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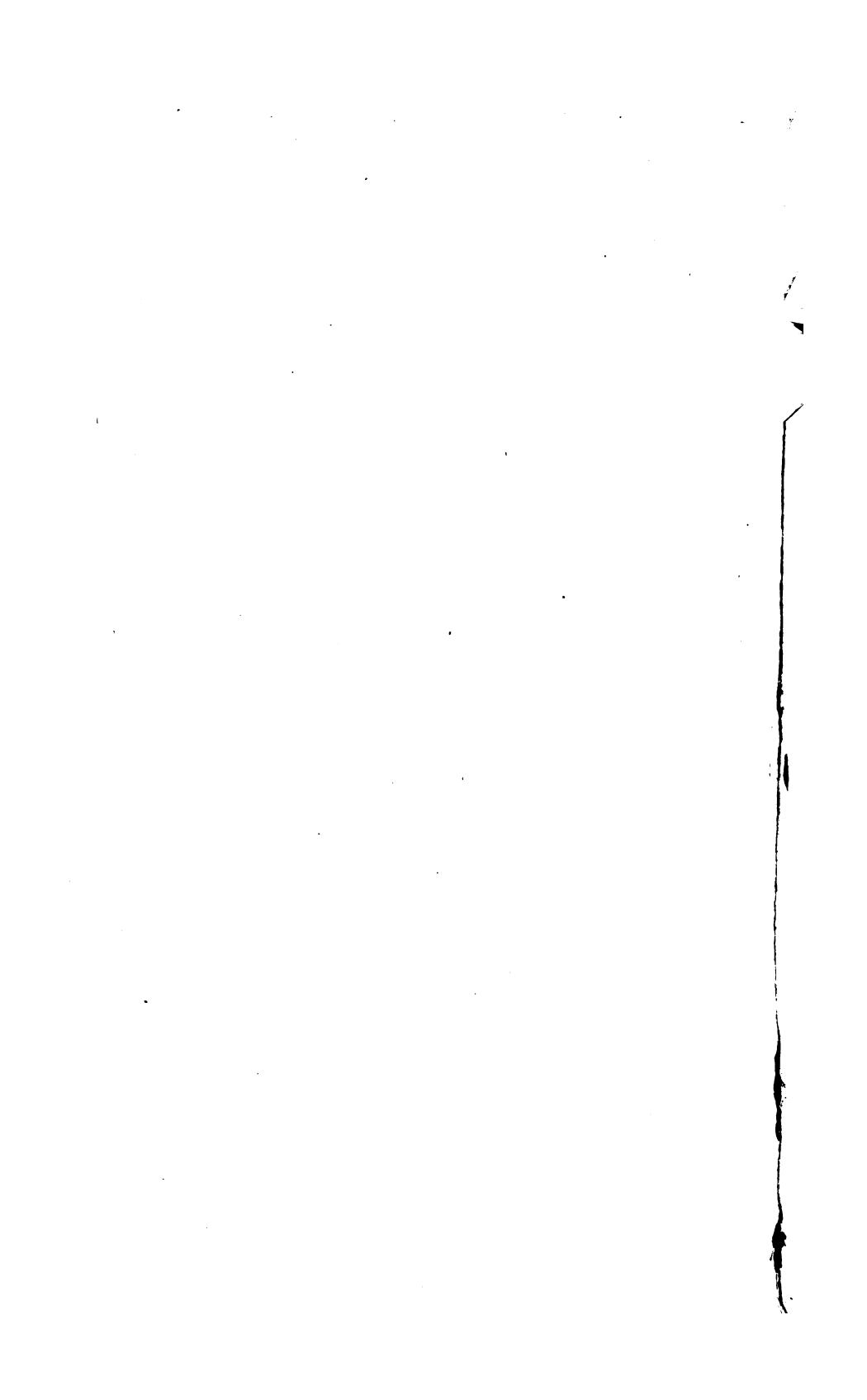


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H E L G A.

A POEM.

IN SEVEN CANTOS.

BY

THE HONORABLE WILLIAM HERBERT.

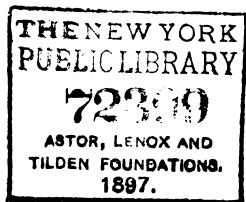
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PREFACE.

THE following poem, which has remained for several years in an unfinished state, was commenced soon after the publication of the translations which I made from the relicks of ancient Icelandic or Scandinavian poetry. I was at that time forcibly struck with the poetical images which the manners and religion of the northern nations

appeared to present; and, feeling that I was prevented from giving them full effect by the fidelity which I deemed necessary in the translation of writings which derived their principal interest from their antiquity and peculiarities, it occurred to me that, by undertaking an original poem of which the scene might be laid amongst the ancient Scandinavians, I should be able to illustrate their manners, and religion, and superstitions, in a form that would be more pleasing to the reader, and to avail myself of a wide field for poetical

composition, which had been as yet untouched by any writer except in a few short and unconnected translations. My attention was afterwards withdrawn from the undertaking by other pursuits ; and the poem, which had been long neglected, has been lately completed and revised. The foundation of the tale is historical ; in what respects I have altered it will be stated in the notes. The poem will, I hope, be found to contain a faithful picture of the manners and superstitions of the period which it represents. I have

attempted to give it the coloring of poetry,
and to temper with chaster ornaments
the rude wildness of Scaldic fiction.

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H

V



Glistens like flame, and every hand
Unconscious grasps the trusty brand.
But straight uncouth and strange surprise
Has quench'd the lightning of their eyes ; 50
And every hand has loosed its hold,
And silent droops each warrior bold.
Twelve champions huge stalk'd proudly in ;
Each wore a wolf's dark brindled skin ;
But loftier, fiercer, statelier too, 55
Seem'd one, the leader of the crew ;
Shew'd strength of more gigantic mould,
And foremost strode, unask'd and bold.
On his vast limbs, of beauteous form,
Half bare, half shielded from the storm, 60
The shaggy wolfish skin he wore
Pinn'd by a polish'd bone before ;
Nor other ornament he knew,
Save curling locks of raven hue,

Which like a glossy mantle hung 65

O'er his broad shoulders loosely flung.

No shield was held before his breast;

No burnish'd steel his bosom press'd;

No quaintly twisted iron shirt,

No coat of mail was round him girt:

70

With forehead bare the fight he tried,

On inborn force his heart relied.

Not stoutest kemp of modern days

His wonderous sword from earth might raise,

But swift as light the champion's arm

75

Could wield it to his foeman's harm.

His ponderous mace a knotty oak,

That ne'er had felt the woodman's stroke;

Himself had torn it from the side

Of Kiölen in its leafy pride.

80

Yet was the champion mild and kind,

Save when the fury vex'd his mind,

Or some ungratified desire
Lit in his breast unhallow'd fire ;
For then with more than mortal force 85
He urged amain his headlong course,
By strange internal phrensy driven,
Like an avenging scourge of heaven ;
Till all exhausted with the fray,
And sickening, on the earth he lay ; 90
His swollen eyes bloodstain'd and dim,
Life quivering in each strained limb.
But often in his milder day
Might infants with his wild locks play ;
Oft would he list the minstrel's measure, 95
Or quaff the social cup of pleasure ;
Waste in delight the peaceful hour,
And carp of love in maiden's bower.
But now strange passion lit his eye ;
It seem'd, who met its glance must die. 100

To the high dais with speed he pass'd;
His voice was like a killing blast.

“ These are my brothers, Ingva, born
“ Like me to meet proud men with scorn.
“ Angantyr is the name I boast,
“ Well famed in war, itself a host.”

The King, though ruffled by his pride,
Rein'd his high wrath, and mild replied :

“ What brings ye to King Ingva's lands?
“ What boon require ye from his hands?”—

“ Ask you mine errand, while the board
“ Has only fed thy subject horde?
“ Discourteous man, supply the feast
“ Meet welcome for a warlike guest!
“ Let thy fair daughter's snowy hand
“ Pour the bright mead at thy command;
“ And bid this proud unmanner'd crew
“ Yield us fit space and honor due.”

105

110

115

The board was deck'd, the feast was spread ;
Due space was given, due honor paid, 120
And mead pour'd by the blooming maid;
But, as she near'd the giant chief,
She trembled like an aspen leaf :
And first he quaff'd the beverage rare,
Then gazed upon the timid Fair. 125
He has ta'en her by the slender waist,
And to his rugged bosom press'd.
He has laid his hand upon her face,
And held her in his strict embrace,
While the maid blush'd all scarlet red, 130
And strove to hide her weeping head.
He has placed her on his knee, and kiss'd
Her coral lips e'en as he list.
Then rising from his seat he cried,
“ King Ingva, this must be my bride ! ” 135
The monarch look'd around his board,

But not one warrior breathed a word :

Then, frowning, thus in hasty mood—

“ Not thus, sir Knight, are damsels woo’d.”

But little reck’d that champion dire

140

Of maiden’s blush or monarch’s ire ;

He cast his goblet on the floor,

He stamp’d, and with a fiendish roar—

“ Sail’d I from Ledra’s stately port

“ To yield base homage at thy court ?

145

“ To praise the venison at thy board,

“ Or mead, with which thy vaults are stored ?

“ King, I have vow’d to bear her hence ;

“ Nor leave I ask, nor shun offence.

“ At solemn feast all Denmark heard

150

“ My high sworn oath and plighted word—

“ Never to comb my coal-black hair

“ Till I have won this peerless fair.

“ In Ledra reigns my royal sire

“ O'er arms of might and hearts of fire ;

155

“ Ten thousand Danes await my word

“ To waste thy realm with flame and sword ;

“ I turn not to my native land

“ Ere thy best blood has dyed my brand.”

One moment was the King's cheek white,

160

The next was red as morning light.

I know not whether fear or wrath

Had chased the warm blood from its path ;

But in that instant prouder far,

Than e'er his crest had gleam'd in war,

165

King Ingva started on his feet ;

Behind him rang the gilded seat :

And,—“ Lives not here one dauntless head,

“ Of all my princely wealth has fed,

“ To dare the combat?—Who shall free

170

“ My daughter, takes her hand from me !”

The long roof echo'd ; as he spoke,

Strange feelings mingled in his look,
High pride from ancient lineage flowing,
And well-earn'd worth, and valor glowing,
Parental fondness stung with rage,
And conscious impotence of age.

175

O for a painter's hand to trace
The lineaments of every face
In the dread pause that follow'd!—Bright'

180

Streaming from high the torches' light
Fell on Angantyr's savage brow,
Lent his stern cheek a fiercer glow,
And o'er his glossy raven hair

Glanced like a meteor in mid air.

185

And is it anger flashing high,
Or vengeful scorn that lights his eye?
That eye, which never rival found

Who dared to stand on listed ground!

That eye, which oft has shot dismay

190

Through legions in the battle fray !
His left hand grasp'd the trembling maid,
His right was in defiance spread ;
As from king Ingva proudly turning,
(The soul with unblest hatred burning) 195
Scowl'd his fierce aspect on the board,
Where tongueless sat each puny lord ;
Where all those honors, whilom gain'd
On fields with Finnish carnage stain'd,
Seem'd withering underneath the form 200
Of that outstretch'd gigantic arm.
O Sweden ! is thy glory low ?
Must all thy well-earn'd trophies bow ?
Lives there not one of all thy sons,
Of all through whom thy life-blood runs, 205
Who dares to die for thy sweet fame,
And dying gain a deathless name ?
Lives there not one, whose partial care

Turns to that jewel pure and rare?
That beauteous form with sorrow shrowded, 210
Those gentle eyes with tears o'erclouded!
To cheer with hope the troubled Fair,
That trembling, fainting, nigh despair,
Hangs like a pale and lifeless corse
In the rude grasp of ruthless force! 215
As some sweet floweret newly blown,
On which the vernal beams have shone,
Shrinks weeping from the nightly frost,
And droops, and seems for ever lost,
Nor hopes that genial suns to-morrow 220
Will cheer its form and chase its sorrow.
Yes, there is one who pants for glory
Whose name shall live in tuneful story!
Yes, there is one whose kindling eye
Beams with love-lighted sympathy!
It was a dreadful pause, I said, 225

But dreadful as the lightning sped.
The echoes of King Ingva's call
Still linger'd through the vaulted hall,
When from the board a mailed man
Rose calm, collected, and began.

“ Angantyr, I have known thy fame,

“ Wide is the rumor of thy name.

“ What warriors by thy prowess slain

“ Have bow'd the head and bit the plain,

“ What bones lie whitening on the fell,

“ The raven and the wolf can tell :

“ Nor ever was it known or said

“ That thou hast from the combat fled,

“ Or shunn'd the call, when adverse lords

“ Have dared thee to the strife of swords.

“ Proud champion, thou hast told thy vow,

“ And I am firm, and proud as thou.

“ My name Hialmar, known as wide

230

235

240

“ As battle spreads its bloody tide. 245

“ When the young leaves adorn the spray,

“ When vernal birds first pour their lay,

“ I challenge thee to mortal fight;

“ Samsoe the field ; this maid our right.

“ Which shall embrace her as his bride,

250

“ Odin and our good swords decide !”

To him the champion scornful said :—

“ Seek thou a bride amongst the dead !

“ Shall the low vassal cull the prize

“ Destined to charm a hero’s eyes ? 255

“ And dares a puny man withstand

“ The stroke of high Angantyr’s brand ?

“ True, thou hast spoken passing fair,

“ And noble seem thy words and air ;

“ Pity thou lack’st both force and might,

260

“ And limbs by nature nerved for fight.

“ Crush’d like a worm, without a blow

“ My trampling foot might lay thee low.
 “ But, though my strength, by thee defied,
 “ Swells like a torrent’s gather’d pride, 265
 “ And at one swoop might clear the board,
 “ Ingva, of all thy vassal horde,
 “ Revered the laws of combat stand,
 “ The bold defiance stays my hand.
 “ Short respite gain’d, the vernal ray 270
 “ Shall see thee torn by beasts of prey.
 “ Then, Helga, shall thy dainty charms
 “ Be clasp’d in proud Angantyr’s arms ;
 “ And those high joys for thee design’d
 “ Shall stamp thee first of womankind. 275
 “ Who shares Angantyr’s honor’d bed
 “ Above all brides must rear the head.”

He ceased; old Ingva yields assent
 To the dread fight’s arbitrement.

“ Whate’er,” he cries, “ the virgin’s lot, 280

“ Spared be the peasant’s peaceful cot !
“ Save we the flower of northern might
“ For Celtic wars and Finnish fight,
“ Nor let wild havoc’s ruthless flood
“ Defile these sister realms with blood ! 285
“ Where barren Samsoe breasts the tide,
“ Shall solemn proof of arms be tried.
“ On brave Hialmar’s trusty brand
“ We dare to venture life and land ;
“ And, stranger, thus we pledge our faith, 290
“ Thine be fair Helga’s hand, or death !”

E’en as he spoke, the champion’s ire
Flash’d from his savage eye like fire ;
Little wont he to quell the tide
Of swelling wrath and boisterous pride ; 295
Yet ere the hour of solemn strife
He may not harm his foeman’s life :
So wills imperious Honor’s creed,

For which bold Northmen toil and bleed.

But,—whether, furious, to assuage 300

The agony of inward rage,

As the clench'd hands of writhing pain

Strive by strain'd pressure ease to gain,

Or whether, scornful, to alarm

By some dire proof,—his sinewy arm 305

Round a huge shaft he threw, whose height

Bore the strong ceiling's ample weight,

And shook it nodding to its fall,

Till the vast fabric of the hall

Quaked to its base ; trembled the roof, 310

Trembled each casement tempest-proof;

Rang every stone and carved beam,

Gaped every massive timber's seam ;

Another touch had whelm'd in dust

Buttress, and arch, and beam of trust. 315

Wrathful he smiled, and thence in haste

With headlong step the threshold pass'd.

Him follow'd all that wolfish crew,

Eleven brothers firm and true;

And when they reach'd the forest hoar,

320

Mountain and dale sent back their roar.

Fury constrain'd must have its vent,

And rage, till its dread force is spent;

E'en things inanimate must know

Their brutish strength and vengeful blow.

325

Each snow-clad rock must feel the dint,

Huge fragments fly of stone and flint;

And, as the phrensy nerves their strength,

Uprooted lies the forest's length:

Then sated with the bootless fray

330

Homeward they wend their weary way.

In Ingya's hall the strife had ceased,

But mirth could not relume the feast;

She, who should deck the mantling bowl,

His breast no anxious presage knows.
Though dark and strange the peril seem,
Love bids it glow with dazzling gleam.
His ardent thoughts flow high and fast,
Too strong the tide of joy to last. 375
Fix'd on the fair his gazing sight
Anticipates unknown delight,
And fondly deems a coming day
Shall years of silent love repay;
For though he ne'er had dared a sigh, 380
Nor taught his hopes to soar so high,
Yet oft the sad mind's feverish fit,
The fond glance by pale passion lit,
The pang suppress'd, had half betray'd
His secret to the gentle maid; 385
And Helga coy, she knew not why,
Shrunk from Hialmar's beaming eye.
Not that its glance could yield offence,

Or scare the doves of innocence ;
But that it touch'd some tremulous string 390
That thrill'd e'en to life's secret spring,
And waked each sympathetic chord
To vibrate there in sweet accord.
Day after day stole quickly on :
Love unresisted and unknown 395
Had gain'd the incautious heart, and wound
His unsuspected chains around ;
Unknown, till danger's fearful dream
Shew'd how the tyrant reign'd supreme.
Nor less in Asbiorn's heart of fire 400
Throbb'd the high pulse of young desire ;
Though now by chilling sickness staid
On lowly couch his strength was laid :
For he had mark'd each growing charm
Of youthful Helga's perfect form, 405
And oft his sweetly warbling tongue

For her had breathed love's daring song.

To Ingva's court a stripling sent,

There had his careless years been spent,

While sporting o'er the flowery green

410

He call'd the maid his elfin queen,

And wreathed with many a mystic flower

The garland for her summer bower.

There, with light foot and sparkling eye,

The sprightly maze of infancy;

415

Oft, when the spring had deck'd the sod,

Together had they swiftly trod.

When first, as trumpets bray'd afar,

Young Asbiorn sought the distant war,

A sigh had heaved her infant heart,

420

That friends so passing dear must part;

A tear had dimm'd her glistening eye,

That oft in fight the bravest die.

But, though his form was fresh as May,

And his blithe words were ever gay, 425

On calm Hialmat's gentler mind

All her fond thoughts of bliss reclined;

By his her trembling heart was fired,

For him her secret vows aspired,

And all that she had own'd from heaven 430

Of love and faith to him were given.

Deep night in stillness veils the pole,

And silent hours unheeded roll.

Alone, when watchful tapers shine,

Young Helga's beauteous limbs recline. 435

Her couch is of the eider down,

Her coverlet a bear-skin brown

Trimm'd with soft ermine, and below

The claws with burnish'd metal glow;

And many an herb of sweet perfume 440

Breathes incense round the odorous room.

But what avail that spicy breeze,
Those soft appliances of ease !
While bodeful fears and anxious love
The restless thoughts to wildness move,
And the strange workings of the mind
Are like the storm of raging wind ;
That ploughs the bosom of the sea
With fierce impetuous mastery,
Wave driving after wave, while that
Which seem'd one instant big with fate
Bearing all down before it, now
Lies buried in the abyss below.
So o'er sad Helga's troubled soul
The swelling waves of passion roll ;
Thoughts after thoughts successive rise,
And each fond scheme unfinish'd dies.
But, rather than one season live

445

450

455

In doubtful anguish, she would give
Long years of hoped-for bliss, to know
The issue of her present woe.

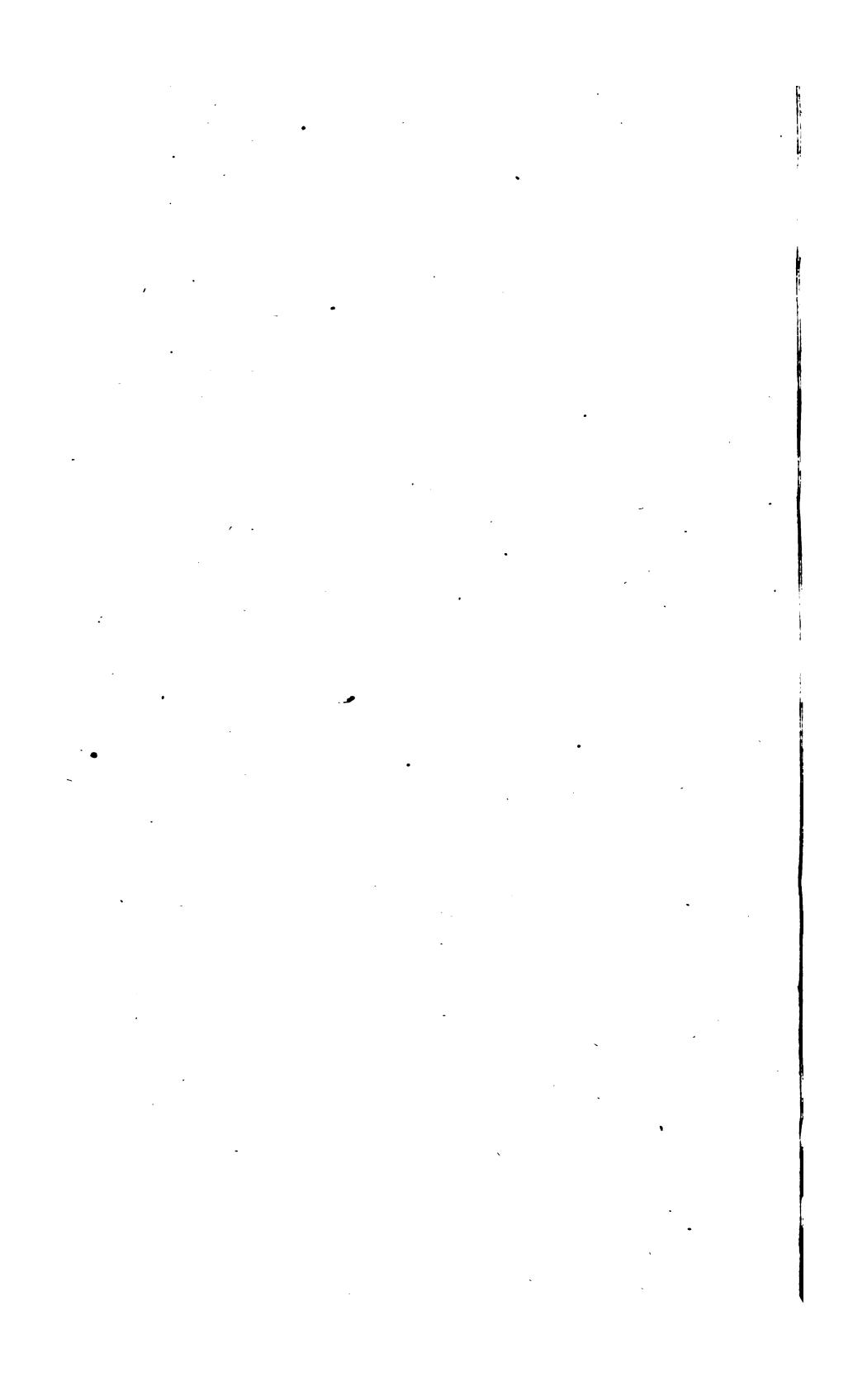
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END OF CANTO I.



H E L G A.

CANTO II.



CANTO II.

HARD by the eastern gate of Hell
In ancient time great Vala fell ;
And there she lies in massive tomb
Shrowded by night's eternal gloom.
Fairer than Gods, and wiser, she
Held the strange keys of destiny ;
And not one dark mysterious hour
Was veil'd from her all-searching power.
She knew what chanced, ere time began,
Ere world there was, or Gods, or man ;

465

470

And, had she list, she might have told
Of things that would appal the bold.
No mortal tongue has ever said
What hand unknown laid Vala dead ;
But yet, if rumor rightly tells,
In her cold bones the spirit dwells ;
And still, if bold intruder come,
Her voice unfolds his hidden doom :
And oft the rugged ear of Hell
Is sooth'd by some melodious spell,
Slow-breathing from the hollow stone
In witching notes and solemn tone ;
Immortal strains, that tell of things,
When the young down was on the wings
Of hoary Time, and sometimes swell
With such a wild enchanting peal,
As heard above would fix the eye
Of nature in sweet ecstacy,

475

480

485

490

Steal every sense from mortal clay,
And drag the willing soul away.

Dark is the path, and wild the road,
That leads unto that dread abode ;
By shelving steeps, through brier and wood,
Through yawning cliff and cavern'd flood,
Where thousand treacherous spirits dwell,
Loose the huge stones, bid waters swell,
And guard the dire approach of Hell.

And none, since that high Lord of Heaven,
To whom the sword of death is given,
Stern Odin, for young Balder's sake,
Has dared the slumbering Vala wake.

But love can pass o'er brier and stone
Unharm'd, through floods and forests lone ;
Love can defy the treacherous arm
Of spirits leagued to work its harm,
Pierce the dread silence of the tomb,

495

500

505

And smooth the way, and light the gloom.

Whence art thou? essence of delight!

Pure as the heavens, or dark as night!

510

Feeding the soul with fitful dreams,

And ever blending the extremes

Of joys so fearful, cares so sweet,

That woe and bliss together meet!

Thy touch can make the lion mild,

515

And the sweet ringdove fierce and wild.

Thy breath can rouse the gentlest maid

That e'er on couch of down was laid,

Brace her soft limbs to meet the cold,

And make her in the danger bold;

520

The breast, that heaves so lily-white,

Defy the storms and brave the night,

While the rude gales, that toss her hair,

Seem whispers of the tremulous air,

And heaviest toils seem passing light,

525

And every peril new delight.

O whose is that love-lighted eye?

What form is that, slow gliding by?

Sweet Helga, risen from the bed

Where sleepless thy chaste limbs were laid,

530

Thou darest explore that dread abyss,

To learn what tides thee, woe or bliss!

Whether it stand by fate decreed

That stern Angantyr's breast shall bleed,

Or he to whom in secret turn'd

535

Thy heart with gentle passion burn'd,

He whom thy soul had learn'd to cherish,

For thy dear sake untimely perish.

The night was calm ; a pallid glow

Stream'd o'er the wide extended snow,

540

Which like a silvery mantle spread

O'er copse, and dale, and mountain's head.

O who has witness'd near the pole

The full-orb'd moon in glory roll !

More splendid shines her lustrous robe,

545

And larger seems the radiant globe ;

And that serene unnumber'd choir,

That pave the heaven's blue arch with fire,

Shoot through the night with brighter gleam,

Like distant suns, their twinkling beam.

550

While in the north its streamers play,

Like mimic shafts of orient day ;

The wonderous splendor fiery red

Round half the welkin seems to spread,

And flashes on the summits bleak

555

Of snowy crag or ice-clad peak,

Lending a feeble blush, to cheer

The twilight of the waning year.

The thoughtful eye undazzled there

May pierce the liquid realms of air,

560

And the rapt soul delighted gaze

On countless worlds that round it blaze.
No floating vapor dims the sight
That dives through the blue vault of night,
While distance yields to fancy's power,
And rapture rules the silent hour.

565

A calm so holy seem'd to brood
O'er white-robed hill and frozen flood,
A charm so solemn and so still,
That sure, if e'er the sprites of ill
Shrink from the face of nature, this
Must be the hallow'd hour of bliss,
When no dark elves or goblins rude
Dare on the walks of man intrude.

570

Pure as the night, at that calm hour,
Young Helga left her virgin bower;
And trod unseen the lonely road
To gloomy Hela's dire abode.
The broken path and toilsome way.

575

Adown a sloping valley lay, 580
Whose solid rocks on either side
Might have the hand of Time defied ;
But some convulsion of old Earth
Had given the narrow passage birth.
Onward with laboring steps and slow 585
The virgin pass'd, nor fear'd a foe.
The moon threw gloriously bright
On the grey stones her streaming light ;
Till now the valley wider grew,
And the scene scowl'd with dreariest hue. 590
From the steep crag a torrent pouring
Dash'd headlong down, with fury roaring,
Through frozen heaps that midway hung ;
And, where the beams their radiance flung,
Columns of ice and massive stone 595
Blending and undistinguish'd shone ;
While each dark shade their forms between

Lent deeper horror to the scene ;
And gloomy pines, that far above
Lean'd from the high and rocky cove,
With frozen spray their heads besprent
Under the hoary burthen bent.

Before her spread a forest drear
Of antique trees with foliage sere ;
Wreathed and fantastic were their roots,
And one way stretch'd their stunted shoots :
And each time-hollow'd trunk might lend
Harbor to beast or wilier fiend.

She seem'd in that strange wilderness
A spirit from the realms of bliss,
A beauteous form of radiant light
Charming the fearful brow of night.
The wind with a low whisper'd sigh
Came rushing through the branches dry ;
Heavy and mournful was the sound,

609

605

610

615

And seem'd to sweep along the ground.

The virgin's heart throbb'd high ; the blood

Beat at its doors with hastier flood :

But, firm of purpose, on she pass'd,

Nor heeded the low rustling blast.

620

A mist hung o'er the barren ground,

And soon she was all mantled round

In a thick gloom, so dark and dread,

That hardly wist she where to tread.

Mute horror brooded o'er the heath,

625

And all was dark and still as death :

When sudden a loud gust of wind,

Shaking the forest, roar'd behind,

And seem'd wolves howling in the brake,

And in her path the hissing snake.

630

Then all was hush'd ; till swift and sheen

A meteor flash'd upon the scene,

And a hoarse laugh burst on her ear,

And then a hideous shriek of fear.

Dire phantoms, in the gloom conceal'd,

635

Were instant by that light reveal'd;

For, lurking sly, behind each tree

Strange faces peep'd with spiteful glee,

And ghastly forms and shapes obscene

Glided the hoary rocks between.

640

O who shall save thee, Helga! mark

The ambush'd spirits of the dark!

Those are the powers accurst, that ride

The blasting whirlwind, and preside

O'er nature's wrecks; whose hands delight

645

To weave the tempest of the night,

Spread the red pestilence, and throw

A deeper gloom o'er human woe!

Those are the fiends, that prompt the mind

To deeds of darkness, and behind

650

Send their fell crew with sickening breath,

Despair, and infamy, and death !

Nor yet unmoved the virgin gazed ;

She trembled as that meteor blazed .

But high her snow-white arms she spread ,

655

And to the Queen of beauty pray'd .

“ Immortal Freya ! if e'er my mind

“ Has to thy gentle rites inclined ;

“ If e'er my hands have garlands wove

“ Of flowers, the symbols of chaste love ,

660

“ And cull'd from all its blooming hoards

“ The sweets which opening spring affords ;

“ If I have knit the silken twine

“ To deck thy pure and honor'd shrine ;

“ Immortal Freya, attend my prayer !

665

“ To a lone virgin succour bear !

“ Give me to reach great Vala's grave ,

“ And from the powers of darkness save ! ”

Fair Helga spoke ; and, as she pray'd ,

A charm descended on her head, 670

Like the sweet fall of dulcet sound,

Or dew distill'd on holy ground :

And vanish'd seem'd the powers of ill,

And nature smiled serene and still.

The darksome mist was roll'd away,

675

And tranquil, as the fall of day,

A milder gloom imbrown'd the way ;

While through that wild and barren scene

The lofty gates of Hell were seen.

A strain delightful pouring slowly

680

Breath'd in soft cadence pure and holy ;

And the strange voice she long'd to hear

Stole gently on her wondering ear.

Hark ! the wild notes are sweetly swelling,

Now upon things unearthly dwelling,

685

And now of Time's old secrets telling.

To rapture charm'd, fair Helga long

Stood listening that immortal song;
 But onward now she sprung with haste,
 And Hell's dread portals quickly pass'd. 690
 Then, starting from his gory bed,
 The whelp of Hela raised his head,
 Gnash'd his keen fangs, and fiercely bay'd.
 His glowing eyes with fury scowl'd,
 And long and loud the monster howl'd: 695
 For well he mark'd athwart the gloom
 A living form by Vala's tomb.
 But unappall'd the virgin stood,
 And thus, in calm unalter'd mood :
 " By the force of Runic song, 700
 " By the might of Odin strong,
 " By the lance and glittering shield
 " Which the Maids of slaughter wield,
 " By the gems whose wonderous light
 " Beams in Fréya's necklace bright, 705

“ By the tomb of Balder bold,
“ I adjure thine ashes cold.
“ Vala, list a virgin’s prayer !
“ Speak ! Hialmar’s doom declare !”

She ceased ; when, breathing sad and slow, 710
Like some unwilling sound of woe,
A sweetly solemn voice was sent
Forth from that gloomy monument.

“ Deep-bosom’d in the northern fells
“ A pigmy race immortal dwells, 715
“ Whose skilful hands can forge the steel
“ With many a wonderous muttered spell.
“ If bold Hialmar’s might can gain
“ A falchion from their lone domain,
“ Nor stone, nor iron shall withstand 720
“ The dint of such a gifted brand ;
“ Its edge shall drink Angantyr’s blood,
“ And life’s tide issue with the flood.

“ Victorious, at night’s silent hour,
 “ The chief shall reach fair Helga’s bower. 725

“ But thou, frail maid, who darest invade
 “ The realms, where rest the quiet dead ;
 “ Breaking the slumbers of the tomb
 “ With charms that rend Hell’s awful gloom ;
 “ Who seek’st to scan, with prescience bold, 730

“ What Gods from mortal man withhold,
 “ Soon shall thine heart despairing rue
 “ The hour that gave these shades to view,
 “ And Odin’s wrath thy steps pursue.”

It ceased ; and straight a lurid flash 735
 Burst through the gloom with thunder-crash.
 It lighted all Death’s dreary caves,
 It glared on thousand thousand graves.
 Hell’s iron chambers rang withal,
 And pale ghosts started at the call ; 740
 While, as the gather’d tempest spreads,

Rush'd the red terror o'er their heads.

And well I deem, those realms might show

Unnumber'd shapes of various woe;

Lamenting forms, a ghastly crew,

745

By the strange gleam were given to view;

And writhing Agony was there,

And sullen motionless Despair:

Sights, that might freeze life's swelling tide,

Blanch the warm cheek of throbbing pride,

750

And shake fair reason's frail defence,

Though strongly nerved by innocence.

Nor dared the breathless virgin gaze

On Hell's dread cells and devious ways;

Back to her heart the current flow'd,

755

And, as with horror curdling, stood;

Each strained sense was on the wing,

And tarried seem'd life's wholesome spring,

As fainting on the murky clay

In speechless trance sweet Helga lay.

760

Her glowing lips are pale and cold;

Her dainty limbs of heavenly mould,

Fashion'd for bliss and form'd to rest

On couch of down by love carest,

Lie by yon damp and mouldering tomb,

765

Faded, and stript of mortal bloom;

Like a neglected wreath of snow,

Or flowers on broken hawthorn bough.

Shall e'er again that bosom move,

And own the subtle pulse of love?

770

Shall e'er those languid beauties stir?

Shall Heaven's pure light revisit her?

Or is she thus enveloped quite

By curtain of eternal night?

And ye, whoe'er repine on earth

Cursing the fatal hour of birth,

Say, does her fate for pity cry,

775

Or were it best to sink and die,
While innocence unmix'd with guile
And flattering love and beauty smile? 780

To leave the joys of youth half tasted,
To fly, before its dreams are blasted,
Its charms foredone, its treasures wasted?
Ere guilty bliss with secret smart
Has touch'd the yet untainted heart, 785

To shun the pleasure and the crime,
Nor trust the wintery storms of time?

I know not, I, what guardian power
Watch'd over Helga's deathlike hour;
Whether by pity moved and love 790

Bright Freya glided from above,
Spread round her limbs some viewless spell,
And snatch'd her from the jaws of Hell;
Or Odin's self reserved the Fair
For other woes and worse despair. 795

But this I know, at dawn of day
In her still bower young Helga lay,
And waking, as from feverish dream,
Hail'd the bright morning's orient beam.

END OF CANTO II.

H E L G A.

CANTO III.



CANTO III.

Soft sleep, thou balm of every ill, 800
Thy touch the troubled breast can still!
Thy downy wings of peace outspread
Can soothe the wretch's aching head,
Win from his brow grief's stern control,
And in sweet calmness lull the soul. 805
And thou hast stores, whose pure delight
Thrills through each sense and charms the sight;
Stirs the sad lover's pulse to joy,
Which waking truth will soon destroy;

Leads him through Chili's orange groves, 810
Or where La Plata flowery roves,
To lay him with his darling maid
Under the plantain's spreading shade,
Where wanton tendrils hung with bloom
Twining around distil perfume, 815
And thousand little warblers dwell
Sweeter than love-lorn Philomel.
But hast thou not thy terrors too?
Thy fearful shapes of ghastliest hue?
When the soul writhes beneath the load 820
That weighs upon its frail abode;
While on thy pinion horrors brood,
And visions on the fancy crowd
Of ills that falling still impend,
Of vain pursuits that never end, 825
Of woes that shake fair reason's seat,
Or at the door of conscience beat.

And hast thou ne'er to anxious mind,
Mid pictured scenes of wildest kind,
Dread warnings and things closely seal'd 830
In dark futurity reveal'd ?
And sometimes e'en through visions strange
The wakeful thoughts distemper'd range,
While the mind's eye with troubled sight
Can scarcely read its path aright, 835
And memory but ill descry
The limits of reality ?
Thus some have deem'd, that Ingva's maid
Had toss'd upon a restless bed
Through that long night of dark despair, 840
Nor felt in truth Hell's chilling air ;
And that at morn her spirit vex'd
Was by wild fancies still perplex'd,
When full before her frightened eye
Stern Odin seem'd to stand; and cry— 845

“ Adventurous maid, whose impious feet
 “ Have dared explore death’s shadowy seat,
 “ Rifting the womb of hoary time,
 “ Hear the dark penance of thy crime !
 “ The vision of this night once told, 850
 “ Memory shall quit her sacred hold ;
 “ And that fond love, which bade thee stray
 “ Down yawning Hell’s forbidden way,
 “ That love, for which thou fain wouldest die,
 “ Shall in thy breast forgotten lie ; 855
 “ Till anguish wake thy mind to know
 “ Joy’s strange deceit, and hopeless woe.”
 He said, and instant vanish’d seem’d ;
 Whether in truth she saw or dream’d,
 I know not ; but the chilly blood 860
 At the heart’s passage curdling stood ;
 And mute and motionless she sate,
 Till summon’d to the hall of state.

The King had will'd a joyous day
Should chase the thoughts of yestrene's fray. 865

He had bid his men be trimly dight
Ere the first dawn of morning light,
With torch and pike to rouse the bear
That slumber'd in his wintery lair.
“ The chase is valor's school,” he cried, 870
And gallant to the forest hied.
The golden horn rings blithe and loud ;
The many round their monarch crowd ;
Some skill'd to bend the Upland bow,
Some taught the whizzing lance to throw, 875
Some proud to wield the falchion's weight
And closer deal the stroke of fate :
And dames of worth, and virgins fair,
Are clad to face the wintery air.
In many-color'd furs array'd 880
Hastes to the field each Swedish maid ;

While the harsh winds, that round them rush,
Lend each young cheek a brighter blush,
And emulous of mountain snows
The polish'd forehead's lustre glows.

885

No lovelier forms, no sprightlier train
E'er waked Cythera's echoing plain,
Or shook fair Delos' rocky shore,
Or roused the wolf and brindled boar
Whom deep Mænalian shades imbower.

890

Nor does the languid southern gale
More sweet the breath of love exhale,
Nor bid the heart more warmly glow,
Nor the gay spirits lighter flow,
Than where the breeze of northern sky

895

Braces each limb and lights each eye.
Joy leads them on, o'er comb and glen,
To stir the monster's hoary den;
Some trooping on hot coursers past,

Some with long snow-shoes skaiting fast, 900
Some boldly on the beaked sledge
Gliding o'er precipice and ledge.
See how they scatter o'er the plain !
How laboring now the steep they gain !
Now circled in some rocky nook ! 905
Now gliding down the frozen brook,
O'erhung with stone, and icicle
That brighter gleams than hunter's steel!
Now on yon crag, that strains the sight,
I see them file along the height 910
On giddy causeway, one by one ;
Their weapons sparkle to the sun.
How many dreadful fathom deep
Shot from that high and rugged steep,
The foaming torrent roars beneath ! 915
One slippery step were instant death !
But swift they press along the verge,

And soon mid broader wilds emerge.

The troop had reach'd a narrow pass

Half choked with thorns and wither'd grass. 920

Huge pines and pensile birch o'erhung

Its banks, round which the ivy clung ;

And the rude clay-stone peeping through

Like some old castle seem'd to grow.

A spot so desolate and wild 925

Might charm sad fancy's mournful child :

On rush'd the rout, the deep glen rang

With sylvan shouts and martial clang ;

But Helga, heartless for the chase,

Stopp'd long on those lone banks to gaze. 930

When from a rock which shades ingulph

Sprung sudden forth a brindled wolf.

The ruffian beast had mark'd his prey

Lingering defenceless on her way,

And his keen fangs already tore 935

Her dainty limbs distain'd with gore;
But instant as the bolt of Heaven
Through his dark sides a pike was driven,
And the blush glow'd on Helga's face,
Clasp'd in Hialmar's fond embrace.

940

Alone his eye had mark'd the Fair;
In hour of need his arm was near.

Slight was her wound ; the maiden's heart
Perchance had felt a keener smart,
And the full tide of love and grief
Burst forth to give that heart relief.
Her weeping thus the youth address'd,
As her soft palm he gently press'd.

945

“ O sole on whom my fancy dwells,
“ With whose chaste love my bosom swells!
“ My life, my joy, in hours of peace!
“ My hope, when battle's storms increase !
“ If ever I have raised my hand

950

“ In fight to guard my native land,
“ Thy gentle image, deep impress’d, 955
“ Waked the bold phrensy of my breast,
“ Lured me to tread the paths of fame,
“ And win for thee a worthy name.
“ Yet were my lips in silence closed ;
“ In trembling hope each wish repos’d ; 960
“ And visionary joys alone
“ To this deep-stricken heart were known.
“ Now fortune smiles ; a brighter day
“ Beams on the warrior’s blissful way ;
“ But dark as night his path, if thou 965
“ Chase not the gloom that dims thy brow.
“ By Helga’s smile love’s hopes were rear’d,
“ By that must valor’s arm be cheer’d.
“ O give the willing heart to joy,
“ Nor in the bud fond thoughts destroy ! 970
“ That smile from love new charms shall borrow,

“ And light the languid gloom of sorrow.”

Smiling through tears the virgin spoke,
And all her soul was in the look.

“ The life, thou hast preserved, is thine;

975 .

“ Thy joys or griefs must blend with mine.

“ Hialmar ! though the gloom of woe

“ Tinge my pale cheek and cloud my brow,

“ If my tears speak not, if the voice

“ Faltering betray not love’s fond choice,

980

“ O read the guileless heart, and see

“ Its anguish only wake for thee !

“ Nor deem, if Heaven thy fall foredoom,

“ That Helga will not share thy tomb !

“ E’en like day’s fleeting flower, that, born

985

“ At the blithe call of orient morn,

“ Weeps for the sun’s departed gleam,

“ Nor e’er shall see the morrow beam,

“ To thy dear smiles my heart expands,

“ Chain'd to thy lot my being stands. 990
 “ On thee, beloved, its hopes repose,
 “ Thy Helga's life, her joys, her woes.”

O now what bliss Hialmar shares !
 Warrior, what fate with thine compares !
 Say, who would change the melting mood 995
 Of tender virgin fondly woo'd,
 The beamy smile of weeping love
 Whose gentle rays each doubt remove,
 The timid blush, the bashful eye,
 The sighs that half-exhaled die, 1000
 For those best raptures, which enjoy'd
 Leave half the fancied charm destroy'd !
 Fix'd on her hand a burning kiss
 Glows, the sweet pledge of promised bliss ;
 And now he cheers her drooping form, 1005
 Bids her weak heart with joy be warm,
 And points the hour, in glory's pride

When love shall bloom by valor's side :

But sadness o'er her bosom stole,

And thus she pour'd her troubled soul.

1010

“ Speak not of bliss or joyous love,

“ While the red vengeance wakes above!

“ While o'er thine Helga's fated head

“ The curse of angry Heaven is spread !

“ Last night on restless couch I lay

1015

“ Praying for dawn of morning's ray,

“ Though not the day could bring relief

“ To anxious thoughts and trembling grief.

“ If sleep I wo'd, upon mine ear

“ Burst the wild shrieks of frantic fear,

1020

“ And all the joyous forms of light

“ Seem'd vanishing in misty night ;

“ I woke, by inward power impell'd ;

“ I thought of thee, my fond heart swell'd :

“ To learn thy doom my bosom yearn'd,

1025

“ And (chance what may!) that doom I learn’d.

“ O best beloved, I may not say

“ What terrors frown’d upon my way,

“ Nor living tongue such sights reveal

“ As I have met, to learn thy weal.

1030

“ Suffice, that death’s dread bounds I pass’d,

“ And reach’d great Vala’s tomb at last.

“ I pray’d her by each living thing,

“ By Hell’s abyss, by Heaven’s high King,

“ To speak thy fate ; when sad and slow

1035

“ Breathed from her tomb the notes of woe.

“ Thy hand shall conquer, if it gain

“ A falchion from the drear domain

“ Of that fell Pigmy race, that dwells

“ Deep-bosom’d in the rugged fells.

1040

“ Go boldly forth, thy fortune try !

“ Seek the dread caves that northward lie !

“ But me, alas ! what woes await

“ Pursued and struck by Odin’s hate!

“ What I have dared, did love inspire,

1045

“ Nor Heaven itself shall quench its fire.

“ Thrice blest, if I might lay my head

“ Beneath some melancholy shade,

“ Wooing the thoughts of chaste desire,

“ And clinging to those thoughts expire!”

1050

E’en as she spoke, her wandering eye

Seem’d sadly bent on vacancy;

O’er her pale cheek expiring play’d

A languid smile, and reason stray’d.

She saw the man her bosom loved,

1055

But knew him not, and wildly moved.

She thought Hialmar was her foe,

And, nimbler than the mountain roe,

Burst from his grasp, and swift to fly

Was lost to his admiring eye.

1060

As one amazed the warrior stood,

Wondering her mien and alter'd mood :
But she had breathed love's tenderest voice,
Which bade his inmost soul rejoice ;
And bliss, prevailing o'er surprise, 1065
Lit the young chief's exulting eyes.
But, not one look, one gest forgot,
He strove to scan his future lot ;
And ponder'd each portentous word,
Resolved to win the mystic sword. 1070
His purpose fix'd, he busk'd him strait
For journey perilous and great :
For, ere the wintery snows decay,
He must tread back the dangerous way,
And sail for that dark Samian shore 1075
Gainst which the Baltic billows roar.
To none his steady purpose told,
Alone goes forth Hialmar bold ;
O'er hills and rocks he takes his road

To the fell Pigmies' far abode. 1080

But O what tongue the griefs shall tell
Which, mournful Helga, thee beset!

Thy wandering thoughts and timid breast
By thousand shapeless fears posset!

Who now the blithesome dance shall speed 1085

In Ingva's hall, or pour the mead?

Who now with many a tender smile
The tedious hours of age beguile,
And bid the hoary monarch's brow

Beam gladly through his locks of snow? 1090

Joy of his heart, his bosom's pride,

Fond Helga stands not by his side;

Her hands no more shall crown the bowl,

Her voice no longer cheer his soul:

The notes of pleasure wake not her

The sports of festive Yule to share,

Where gallants press the meeting palm

1095

Of willing maid or sprightly dame,
While glowing hearts and nimble feet
To the light strain responsive beat, 1100
And youth with fresh delight inspires
Gay thoughts of bliss and new desires.

In her lone bower obscure she sits,
Mournful, despairing, strange by fits ;
And thinks she views the vengeful form 1105
Of Odin in each passing storm.
All to pale melancholy given
The pensive eye she lifts to heaven,
And sometimes warbles sad and slow
Her wild imperfect tale of woe, 1110
And trills so sweet the plaintive ditty,
Moving each listening ear with pity,
That e'en the sternest warrior's eye
Glistens with heartfelt sympathy.

H E L G A.

CANTO IV.

And he, who journeying o'er the brow
Of those huge mountains looks below,
(Like some keen falcon towering high)
Beneath him sees wild regions lie,
Strange waste of thicket, comb, and dell,
Bound by the frost's prevailing spell; 1125
Save that, where woods on woods arise,
The gloomy pine its power defies,
And seems to stretch a rival reign
O'er the dread forest's drear domain.
There thousand famish'd wolves repair ; 1135
There slumbering lies the shaggy bear,
Who oft, when summer's dewy night
Smiles with the moon's reflected light,
Sly issues from his secret den
To cultured close in narrow glen, 1140
To crop unseen the verdant ear,
Rifling the promise of the year.

Him shall the lurking boor await,
And wing the midnight shaft of fate :
But now he sleeps in hollow tree 1145
Amid that gloomy scenery ;
Where wood-crown'd rocks that frown around
Some huge expanse of waters bound,
Inlet of sea, or mountain lake
Whose ice-bound waves strange music make, 1150
As through some rude defile they pour,
And, thundering, down the passage roar.
Through such rude scenes Hialmar trod,
And northward bent his trackless road.
Onward he journey'd many a day, 1155
And wilder wastes before him lay.
For need reserved the scanty store
Which in his leathern scrip he bore,
His only drink was mountain snow,
His food the berries hid below. 1160

And now nor gloomy pines appear,
Nor vestige aught of foliage sere ;
Interminable winter's reign
Seems to usurp the barren scene,
Where rocks on rocks high-towering rear 1165
Their frozen heads throughout the year ;
Nor frozen rocks alone ; behold,
In regions of eternal cold,
Of mingled snow and dust and sand
The mimic architecture stand ! 1170
Above the crags that darkest lower,
Above the rocks that highest tower,
Points inaccessible arise,
And mock with varied hue the eyes.
Now like grey minarets they seem, 1175
Now sparkling with the changeful beam,
Now redder than a shaft of flame.
Through the rough fell's romantic pile

Hialmar spied a deep defile.

It was a desert glen to view,

1180

As fancy's pencil ever drew.

No bush was nigh; no shady trees

Spread their green honors to the breeze;

No flower, no verdant grass might hope

To spring upon the barren slope;

1185

Not e'en the hardy ling might dare

To peep mid rocks so wild and bare:

But the dank moss and lichen grey

Spread wide around their lonely sway.

Abruptly on the eastern side

1190

Frown'd the huge steep in awful pride,

Like one vast wall; the summit hoar

With threatening fragments beetled o'er:

And many a hideous mass below

Time-sever'd from its airy brow,

1195

In the deep bosom of the dell

Might yet of ancient ruin tell,
High was the crag, and yet the land
Swell'd loftier on the other hand.
The ridge, that hid the western day, 1200
Rose gradual, strewn with fragments grey:
And he who look'd along the glen
Untrodden by the foot of men,
Might think he view'd a countless flock
Feeding beneath the barren rock. 1205
But all is still; not e'en the deer
Have ever sought to harbour here.
The hollow mountain's mossy side
By mortal step was never tried;
Those are but scatter'd stones, that lie 1210
Whitening beneath the inclement sky.
Above the hollow the proud fell
Rises more steeply from the dell;
Larger and ruder frowns each stone,

Its sides with moss less overgrown; 1215

And, where the highest summit towers,

Naked the rocky castle lowers.

The ridge's bold uneven sweep

Here sinking gives a vista deep

Of the blue heaven; now shooting high

1220

Its giddy beacon strains the eye;

And, though in ruin, seems to stand

As if uprear'd by skilful hand,

Stone upon stone piled wonderously,

With buttress, arch, and turrets high:

1225

Self poised the top-stone seems to rock;

But ages still have seen it mock

The winter storm, the thunder's shock.

A broken path the steep behind,

Midway seem'd indistinct to wind,

1230

If path that be, which never knew

The tread of aught but the Elfish crew.

The track, I deem, if mortal wight
Could climb unto the dizzy height,
Would lead him where the slippery brow
• Shelves o'er the sea, that far below
Dashes unheard its sullen waves
Beneath the cliff's o'erhanging caves.

1235

The warrior gazed with growing wonder;

He deem'd some fiendish Power from under

1240

Had push'd the solid heights asunder;

For well he mark'd the layers grey

Rise on each side in like array.

When sudden as from under ground

Stole on his ear a dulcet sound;

1245

It seem'd a strain of sweetest tone

Warbled by female voice unknown.

The wondering chieftain gazed, and spied

A fissure in the mountain's side:

And listening close he seem'd to hear

1250

Hammer and anvil sounding near ;
And long and loud each heavy stroke
Resounded of that Pigmy folk,
That ever in the darksome cave
Forge the bright metal for the brave.

1255

Of stature small, but mighty force,
Of cunning skill and deep resource,
They know each metal's secret birth,
And delve the bowels of the earth,
Tearing from every hidden cell

1260

The treasures in its womb that dwell.
A spiteful race on mischief bent,
Making man's woes their merriment ;
Deaf to his prayer, and only gain'd
By strong control their aid to lend.

1265

The sounding forge Hialmar knew,
And forth his flaming falchion drew ;
Then, sinking on his knee, raised high

To heaven his bright adoring eye;
 And, as he pour'd the heartfelt vow,
 Proud rapture lit his beauteous brow,
 Triumphant love, unshaken truth,
 And joy, and hope, and glowing youth.

“ Bend, Odin, bend from heaven! and hear,

“ Thou God of war, a warrior’s prayer!

“ Beneath a humble cottage born

“ I learn’d ignoble ease to scorn;

“ To wield the sword, the dart to throw,

“ To bend the Dalecarlian bow,

“ And, where the snow-clad Uplands rise,

“ By prowess win each sylvan prize.

“ An infant by my sire enured

“ To early toils, by toils matured,

“ I learn’d beneath his lone abode

“ Thy lofty song, the warrior’s code.

“ When forth he sent me to the strife,

1270

1275

1280

1285

“ He ask'd not for me length of life :

“ ‘ Renown and glory be his share,’

“ He said.—Great Odin, grant his prayer !

“ Give me to win Angantyr's bane,

1290

“ To triumph o'er that haughty Dane !

“ And let my limbs victorious rest

“ On Helga's bosom fondly prest !

“ Grant this, and Fate ordain the rest !”

He spoke ; and from the mountain's rent

1295

A sudden gleam was upwards sent,

As if in token of assent ;

And a loud clang was heard to sound

In the deep bowels of the ground :

“ Praise to the Gods !” Hialmar cried,

1300

And rush'd into the mountain's side

Through that dread fissure ; deepest shade

Closed on the warrior's dauntless head.

Silent he trod the winding cave,

Dark as the cloisters of the grave, 1305
While round the dank imprison'd air
Sigh'd piteous, breathing chill despair ;
Till full display'd, a glorious light
Burst sudden on his wondering sight.

A vault immense before him lay, 1310
Yet was the dungeon bright as day.
There high uprear'd on either hand
Compact basaltic columns stand,
Shaft above shaft, a monsterous pile,
Like that which girds fair Staffa's isle, 1315
Or the huge mass whose giant pride
Breasts the full strength of Erin's tide.
Nor lacks there radiance to disclose
Their various shapes and magic rows.
Myriads of lights their lustre shed, 1320
By secret exhalations fed ;
And, as each alabaster lamp

Dispels the gloom and joyless damp,
The vaulted roof sends back their rays,
And crystals and stalactites blaze.

1325

Around unnumber'd treasures lie,
Of every hue and changeful die ;
The ore that gives each metal birth,
Torn from the fruitful womb of earth ;

And countless gems, a brilliant heap,
And pearls and corals from the deep.

1330

Next lie huge bars of metal sheen,
Then piles of weapons bright and keen ;
And many an engine form'd for ill
By cunning workmanship and skill.

1335

Beyond, through that long vista seen
The double row of steel between,
In a dread nook obscure and low
The distant furnace seem'd to glow.

A loathsome, wan, and meagre race,

1340

With shaggy chin and sallow face,
Treading with steps demure and slow
The Pigmy folk moved to and fro.
Some on their sturdy shoulders bore
The weight of rude unsmelted ore ; 1345
Some, from the high-piled stores displaced,
The ponderous bars of metal raised ;
Near the hot furnace others staid,
And laboring smote the glowing blade ;
Or, tempering the sharp steel, unheard 1350
Mutter'd the powerful magic word.
In the full centre of the hall
Stood a dark statue, huge and tall ;
Its form colossal, seen from far,
Shew'd like the thunderous God of war, 1355
The sinews strain'd for deadly strife,
The strong limbs starting into life.
Its left hand grasp'd an iron shield,

Its right a threatening falchion held ;
On the pure blade were written plain 1360
These fatal words, " Angantyr's bane."
Hialmar's eyes shone bright as fire,
Their keen glance spoke his soul's desire.
" Art thou," he cried, " the thundering Thor,
" First of the gods in strife and war? 1365
" Or does thy marrowless strength in vain
" Those iron muscles seem to strain
" In threatening mockery, form'd to scare
" The coward from the Pignies' lair?
" Whate'er thou art, Hialmar's hand 1370
" Must tear from thine that flaming brand."
Him answer'd straight, with visage wan,
Smiling in spite, a dwarfish man.
" Go, boaster, seize the shining prize !
" But know, who wins that falchion, dies ! 1375
" Sage Dualin wrought the precious blade,

“ Its edge on charmed anvil laid;
“ And, as each stroke portentous rung,
“ The magic strain old Durin sung,
“ And Thorin and Nyrader wise 1380
“ Swell’d the fell chorus to the skies.
“ They placed it in you iron hand,
“ And whisper’d low their dread command:
“ No arm that ever shook with fear
“ Shall wrest it from that grasp severe; 1385
“ And if by valor’s dauntless son
“ The fatal sword should e’er be won,
“ For him the tomb will early yawn,
“ And grief obscure hope’s flattering dawn.”
The Pigmy ceased, and on his brow 1390
Triumphant malice seem’d to glow;
But prouder wax’d the youth’s desire,
And thus he wing’d his words of fire.
“ To others preach of death and sorrow !

“ I heed not what may fall to-morrow ! 1395

“ Glory and bright renown be mine,

“ And let my deeds, while living, shine !

“ O ! why should man, whose hours must tend

“ To death, their necessary end,

“ In the dull lap of ease retire,

1400

“ And feed unseen life’s feeble fire ;

“ Nor rather strive by worth to share

“ High valor’s guerdon pure and fair !

“ To gleam, like some famed meteor’s blaze,

“ The theme of wonder and of praise,

1405

“ Long chronicled in after times,

“ And sung by bards in distant climes ! ”

He said, and with undaunted breast

To the high trial swiftly press’d :

And (for he knew that Pigmy spite

1410

Forged many a snare with cunning sleight,

And wisely deem’d that iron hand

Might wield with power the charmed brand)
He raised his buckler on his arm,
And proud, as against a living form, 1415
Strode to the combat; closing then,
That falchion, bane of stoutest men,
By its rich-studded hilt he seized,
And the cold iron fingers squeezed.
He pull'd, and stoop'd, and writhing strove 1420
By strength that sturdy grasp to move;
And every nerve and sinew strain'd,
Till force at length the weapon gain'd.
Then back the hand of iron sprang,
And through the vault loud echoes rang; 1425
For it had struck with might the shield
Which in its left that statue held:
And, sudden as the blow, were all
The lights extinguish'd in the hall;
And through the gloom no twinkling shew'd; 1430

Save where the distant furnace glow'd.
To gain the narrow winding cave,
The path which ready entrance gave,
Recover'd from his first surprise,
His treasure won, the warrior tries.

1435

Easy the way for mortal wight
To plunge into those vaults of night,
But hard again from such abyss
To reach the realms of light and bliss.

The youth long labor'd to explore

1440

In each dark nook the hidden door,
And every crevice vainly tried

In the huge cavern's massive side.

When sudden on his listening ear

Swell'd the sweet notes of music near.

1445

He knew the same soft-warbled sound

Which he had heard from under ground.

He spoke, but no response was given,

Save echoes through the long vault driven.

The dulcet warblings seem'd to fly, 1450

And each soft note in distance die.

But, hoping thus with eager mind

Some issue from the gloom to find,

Through many a winding cavern he

Follow'd the floating symphony, 1455

Till distant sparkling light appear'd,

And plain the warbling voice was heard.

“ Proud warrior, thou shalt dwell to-night

“ With the fair queen of the Elves of light ;

“ My voice shall guide thee to the bower 1460

“ Where thou shalt spend the pleasant hour.

“ A thousand Elves of swarthy hue

“ In vain the wonderous virgin woo.

“ O she is fair as diamond's ray,

“ Pure as the hallow'd fount of day, 1465

“ Untouch'd as brilliant gems that lie

“ Deep hid in earth from human eye!

“ Then hie thee, hie thee, youth, to share

“ Joy’s best delights, love’s daintiest fare !

“ Think of fierce wars and strife hereafter, 1470

“ Here is sweet bliss, and mirth, and laughter !”

Well might the warrior marvel, while

The melting notes his ears beguile ;

For issuing from the darksome pass

As now he stood, an ample space

1475

Shew’d like a garden passing fair,

Though nurtur’d in that nether air.

The vaulted roof, all smooth and even,

Seem’d like a blue and cloudless heaven,

Form’d of that pure translucent gem

1480

Which from the billows draws its name.

There quaintly work’d of jewels rare

By nicest art and subtle care,

Thousand odorous shrubs disclose

Their mimic charms in varied rows ; 1485

Their branches deck'd with foliage sheen,

Their opening buds of glossy green,

And flowers of every brilliant hue

Sparkling as with the morning dew.

There hanging from the wanton vine 1490

The amethystine bunches shine ;

There glows untouch'd the purple plum,

And counterfeits the living bloom ;

And many a fruit of southern clime,

The orange bright, the yellow lime ; 1495

The citron weeping from its weight,

The shaddock huge, and golden date.

Beneath a wanton emerald bower,

Cluster'd with pendant fruit and flower,

A gorgeous couch was seen ; the bed 1500

With furs and silken tissue spread.

There in soft luxury reclined

The fairest of the elfin kind.

Stretch'd on the precious mantle warm

Unconscious lay her beauteous form

1505

In gentlest slumber, and the eye

Might all her loveliness descry.

The moist red lips, on which the smile

Ready to kindle slept the while

Soft beaming; and the polish'd brow

1510

Hiding its pure and living snow

Beneath the parting locks, that stray'd

Down her smooth neck, or curling play'd

O'er the white shoulder, and below,

Where the soft bosom's beauties glow.

1515

The tiny hands, the graceful arms,

That loosely rest on snowy charms,

Half seen, half veil'd by flowing vest;

The feet, by no bright sandal press'd;

Her beaming eyes alone conceal'd

1520

Seem'd in deep slumber sweetly seal'd.

Say, gallants, ye who warm in youth
To your loved mistress boast of truth,
Did e'er such peril prove your faith,
And scaped ye without harm or scath ?

1525

Say, did Hialmar's wondering eye
Glisten with high-born ecstasy?
Did the blood mantle o'er his cheek ?

Did to his soul strong passion speak ?

Or stray'd his thoughts from that strange scene 1530
To Sigtune's fir-trees evergreen,

Where deck'd with every tendril sweet
That dares the northern blast to meet,
With every freshest bud that blows,

His Helga's virgin bower arose ?

He shrunk with half-averted eye ;
He moved, he turn'd as if to fly ;
(But the dank passage black as night

1535

Frown'd dismal on his aching sight,)
Then cast his hurried glance around, 1540
While the nymph started at the sound.

As the shy cushat on her nest
Beneath the embowering shade at rest,
If truant steps intrusive shake
The umbrageous boughs or rustling brake, 1545
Spreads her swift pinion to the breeze,
And starts from the soft lap of ease :.
So, beaming loveliness, the fair
Springs from her sleep with timid air,
And blushing like the new-blown rose 1550
A silken mantle round her throws.
Then with a voice so sweet and clear,
It came like music on the ear:—
 “ Fool that I was, to trust the charm
 “ That saved me long from fear and harm ! 1555
 “ While yon portentous sword remain'd

“ In the firm iron grasp constrain’d,
“ To this my chaste and secret bower,
“ Where safe I spent the careless hour,
“ Nor man nor gods could entrance gain,
“ And force and cunning still were vain ;
“ And I had vow’d to be the bride
“ Of him alone, whose daring pride
“ Should wrest the spell-defended brand
“ From that huge statue’s charmed hand.
“ Art thou the bravest of the brave ?
“ Or, say, did guile obtain the glaive ?”

To her the warrior with a smile :

“ Hialmar nothing wins by guile.
“ Nor came I, led by brutish sense,
“ To spurn the rights of innocence,
“ Rifling with rude unhallow’d arms
“ Defenceless beauty’s secret charms.
“ O, thou art more than heavenly fair !

1560

1565

1570

“ No mortal can with thee compare ! 1575
“ And man’s short life would ill repay
“ An hour of rapture spent with thee !
“ But me, constrain’d by holiest bands,
“ High vows recall to distant lands ;
“ Glory, the deathless crown of worth,
“ And love, the warrior’s meed on earth.” 1580

He said; on one white arm reclined
The loveliest, fairest of her kind.

Her pensive look, demure and coy,
Seem'd to suppress the beam of joy, 1585
While o'er her face a languid smile
Play'd gently, fraught with subtle guile ;
And something like reproach was seen
In her mild look and glance serene ;
Fond amorous fears, love's melting ray, 1590
And sweet assent, and faint delay.
The while soft perfumes seem'd to breathe

From every shrub and flowery wreath ;
 Aërial music's mellow sound
 With tenderest warblings floated round ; 1595
 And seem'd all nature to conspire
 Weaving the web of sweet desire.
 By viewless forms the youth was led
 Tow'rds that fair nymph's voluptuous bed.
 Invisible guidance, gentle force,
 That left the will without resource ! 1600
 His mail was loosed by Elfin hands,
 Unknit his armour's iron bands,
 And some light finger strove unseen
 From his tough grasp the sword to win. 1605
 That instant waked to sense of shame
 Sprang back the chief with eyes of flame,
 Starting from that insidious spell
 Which o'er his senses gan to steal ;
 And swift on his unearthly foes 1610

Pour'd the bright weapon's deadly blows

Sudden strange cries assail his ear,

And shrieks of anguish and of fear;

Vanish'd the wanton fairy bower,

Each precious wreath and sparkling flower;

1615

And, all the bright illusion fled,

He views nor nymph nor gorgeous bed,

But skulking at the cavern's door

That spiteful dwarf who spoke before.

There, scaped from ill, the joyful youth

1620

At the cave's dark and narrow mouth,

Stands in the wild and deep ravine

Those high romantic hills between.

Full well he knew the visage wan,

And at the treacherous dwarfish man,

1625

Wing'd with swift vengeance, aim'd a blow

That might have laid a giant low;

But ne'er by vengeance overta'en

Through mortal force was Pigmy slain.

The trenchant metal cleaves the stone,

1630

And the proud warrior stands alone.

END OF CANTO IV.

H E L G A.

CANTO V.



CANTO V.

'TWERE sweet to lie on desert land,
Or where some lone and barren strand
Hears the Pacific waters roll,
And views the stars of Southern pole!

1635

'Twere best to live where forests stretch
Beyond fell man's deceitful reach ;
Where hills on hills proud rising tower,
And native groves each wild embower,

Whose rocks but echo to the howl
Of wandering beast or clang of fowl!

1640

The eagle there may strike and slay ;
The tiger spring upon his prey ;
The kayman watch in sedgy pool
The tribes that glide through waters cool ; 1645
The tender nestlings of the brake
May feed the sly coiling snake ;
And the small worm or insect weak
May quiver in the warbler's beak :
All there at least their foes discern, 1650
And each his prey may seize in turn.
But man, when passions fire the soul,
And reason stoops to love's control,
Deceitful deals the murderous blow
Alike on trustiest friend or foe : 1655
And oft the venom'd hand of hate
Points not the bitterest shaft of fate :
But faithless friendship's secret fang
Tears the fond heart with keener pang,

And love, wild love, can weave a spell 1660

More dreadful than the pains of Hell.

From the red fields of distant fray
Fierce Orvarod homeward bent his way ;
Fierce Orvarod, flush'd with glory's tide,
Sweden's strong bulwark and her pride. • 1665

E'en as he reach'd the frontier bound,
And set his foot to Swedish ground,
His ear had caught the rumor rife
Of outrage past and coming strife.

His men some smoother path might read ; 1670
He through the forest prick'd his steed,
Resolved with speedy arm to lend
Meet succour to his fere and friend.

Behind his brawny shoulders flung
The rattling bow and quiver hung ; 1675
Sure marksman he ; the whizzing breath
Of every shaft was wing'd with death.

His face was gallant, open, free ;
His heart was blithe, and bold his glee,
But nothing courteous : his delight 1680
Death's iron field and bloodiest fight ;
His was the soul of martial fire,
And thirst of ~~fame~~ his sole desire :
In honor firm, in friendship true,
His generous heart no hatred knew ; 1685
Though proud to strike, as proud to show
Fair mercy to the vanquish'd foe.
Women he scorn'd, and deem'd them toys
To charm the sense with transient joys,
To valor's worth a paltry boon, 1690
Easy to win, forsaken soon ;
And faithful love he call'd the dream
Of tender fools, an idle theme :
Shortlived he held the lover's pain,
And every fair one light and vain. 1695

With gallant bearing now he pass'd
O'er the rough steeps and trackless waste.

His cheek was flush'd with ruddy hue,
His crest was wet with morning dew,
As deck'd with foreign spoils he hied

To Sweden's court in warlike pride.

Sudden the loud applauding cries,
"Orvarod! Orvarod!" shook the skies;

And grateful to king Ingva's ear
Came the glad murmurs rising near;

For heaviest cares his heart oppress'd,
And deep the troubles of his breast.

Foremost in strength and beauty's pride
Stands Asbiorn by his comrade's side,
Hails his return to Swedish land,

And greets him with a brother's hand.

To balmy health at length restored
Again the youth had girt his sword;

1700

1705

1710

But, O ! too late in Helga's cause
The flaming weapon now he draws.
Hialmar claims the high emprise,
And his by right the promised prize.
What conflict tears young Asbiorn's heart!

How act the friend's and lover's part !

Bound to Hialmar's warlike fate
By all that makes man good and great,
By generous friendship's holiest ties,
By that pure bond that never dies !

Say, shall the tyrant Love prevail,
And honor's voice and virtue fail ?
Or sober reason's just control
Calm the hot passion of the soul ?
By turns to either part inclined
Swells the strong tide of Asbiorn's mind :

• Restless, at length the court he seeks, 1730
And thus the fiery warrior speaks.

“ Say, Prince, are Helga’s matchless charms
“ A boon too bright for Asbiorn’s arms ?
“ Or does proud Sweden’s haughty throne
“ The service of those arms disown ? 1735
“ Have not my banners floated wide
“ To guard her coasts on either tide ?
“ Have I not roused from eyrie high
“ The watchful eagle’s ravening cry,
“ And hewn in fight the gory food 1740
“ For Finnish wolves, a famish’d brood ?
“ Whatever deeds Hialmar dared,
“ Asbiorn’s firm breast the peril shared.
“ His worth alone gains just reward,
“ He reaps the harvest of his sword ; 1745
“ While I, thus wedded to despair,
“ The barren yoke of glory bear.
“ Where bends he now his heedless way ?
“ Where does the loitering wanderer stray ?

“ But, though approved in hour of need

“ Thy might deserves our richest meed,

“ The word of Kings once duly given

1770

“ Is sacred as the voice of heaven.

“ In him, whate'er his steps detain,

“ We trust ; nor shall that trust be vain.

“ We charge thee by our high command

“ Here to abide and ward our land,

1775

“ Against foreign inroad, and the blow

“ Of sudden unsuspected foe.

“ With him shall Orvarod hoist his sail,

“ And Heaven forefend their arms should fail !”

He ceased ; proud Asbiorn knit his brow,

1780

Nor deign'd before his prince to bow :

But Orvarod laugh'd and mock'd his pain,

And bade him to the waves complain,

Sing some lone ditty on the strand,

Or woo a bride from foreign land ;

1785

Told him of many a melting fair
In soft Sicilia's southern air,
And many a nymph with sparkling eyes
Where Gardariké's mountains rise,
And amorous dames and willing maids
In distant Asia's spicy shades.

In vain ;—he turns with lowering eye ;
He hears not, deigns not to reply :
But forth with folded arms he goes
A man of wrath and sullen woes ;
His heart, no longer light and gay,
Owns a dread Power's imperious sway ;
Wild jealous thoughts and fierce desires
Prevail, and love's resistless fires.

His was a wayward soul, design'd
Extremes of mirth and grief to find.
When flattering joy his heart beguiled,
And pleasure beam'd and beauty smiled,

No lark so blithe that sings in air
While suns are bright and skies are fair; 1805
But, cross'd by fate in luckless hour,
More dark than blackest storms that lower.

In love impetuous and hot,
High swell'd the pang, but soon forgot.
Ardent in friendship, but too light 1810
To hold the reins of honor tight.
Whate'er of vice obscured his mind,
Was passion's gust, not guilt design'd;
But, as he moved in honor's ray,
High pride, not virtue, led the way. 1815
Still he had trod the paths of fame,
Panting to earn a deathless name;
While keen ambition fired his soul,
Romantic thoughts without control,
The flame of unrestrain'd desire, 1820
Quick-kindled wrath and baleful ire.

His shape was symmetry and grace,
And finely form'd his manly face ;
His eye was fire itself, so glowing,
So on each feature life bestowing ;
There was a frankness in its beam,
Which, ere it ask'd, had gain'd esteem ;
And in his lip's love-lighted smile
All nameless charms that maids beguile.

Alas ! that passion's cloud should e'er

1825

Obscure a form so nobly fair !

His limbs were nimbler than the fawn,
That bounds o'er brake and level lawn ;
And even from his childish days
Mid rural sports he won the praise.

1830

His strength had oft in fight been proved,
His valiant heart by warriors loved :
In field of strife or peaceful dell,
Might youthful Asbiorn all excel ;

1835

Boldest to stem the battle's tide ; 1840

Swiftest through perilous pass to ride ;

Blithest with maiden fair to carp ;

And, when him list to strike the harp,

There was a wildness in his lay

That almost witch'd the sense away ; 1845

For he had learnt each peaceful art,

That charms the ear or sways the heart,

And often, stretch'd beneath the bower

Of shadowy woods in sultry hour,

He sweetly waked the mellow horn,

Or carol'd like a bird of morn.

And bold his song ; though Helga's form

Alike must every bosom warm,

He, only he, had pour'd the strain

Of rapturous love, and dared complain : 1855

His fancy roved through dreams of bliss,

And boldly call'd that treasure his.

And oft his youth's unruly tide
Had ruffled Ingva's stately pride ;
But still he bore a witching charm
That saved him from disgrace and harm.

Now o'er his proud desponding soul
Stern anger reign'd, and hopeless dole.

How shall he calm the pang of love,
Whose turbid thoughts resistless move ?

How check the stream of wild desire,
Whom wrath excites and passions fire ?
With downcast and contracted brow,
Sullen and fierce behold him go !

O how unlike that sprightly boy,
Whose eyes were mirth, whose looks were joy !
To that deep woodland lies his road,
Of mournful thoughts the dark abode,
Where oft he whiled the hours away,
Warbling some strange romantic lay,

1860

1865

1870

1875

Of castles storm'd by torches' light,

Of maidens rapt on bridal night,

Of frantic tears and wild delight.

O shall yon forest's silent gloom

Calm his harsh mind and soothe his doom ?

1880

Or is its lonely still retreat

Fitting dread thoughts and dark deceit ?

Hear'st thou a voice cry, " Asbiorn, stay !

" Danger besets thy moody way !"

Stay, Asbiorn, stay ! nor tread the path

1885

To yon thick shades, while big with wrath !

Where in deep nook or rocky cell

Foul powers and tempting spirits dwell ;

For innocence is bliss below,

Fair virtue's shield, the balm of woe.

1890

Who wanders there with gentle mind

Will nought but soothing fancies find,

Sweet dales by peaceful shades imbrown'd,

And glens with tangled coppice crown'd ;
But seek not thou the shadowy bower 1895
While anger reigns and fiends have power !
Sell not for pleasure's transient joy
Pure sweets which Guilt's foul hands destroy,
The gem of youth, the untouch'd bloom
Of life, exhaling fresh perfume ! 1900
Ah me ! he wists not where to turn ;
Haughty and high his passions burn.
Unseen he seeks yon hoary tower ;
He roams by Helga's mournful bower ;
Mid the deep forest's lonely gloom 1905
Where sad she sits and plies the loom,
Weaving with many a golden thread
The stories of the honor'd dead.
And now she lifts her pallid cheek,
Gazing with visage mild and meek. 1910
She speaks not, but her languid eye .

Seems rapt in thoughtful ecstasy,

While in her heart love still supreme

Reigns like a visionary dream.

Its shadowy colors deep impress'd

1915

Tinge each wild fancy of her breast ;

She thinks her faith was pledged in heaven,

She deems her hand in marriage given ;

But pledged to whom, or how, or where,

Weak reason may not well declare.

1920

The images of past delight

Have fleeted from her troubled sight,

And left no perfect form behind

On the dim mirror of the mind :

But anguish for her absent lord

1925

Breathes in each desultory word.

She thinks the spirits of the wold

Him in fell durance fiercely hold,

His beauteous limbs by torture strain'd

On cold obdurate granite chain'd, 1930
Or scorch'd by subterraneous fire
That gleams through caverns dark and dire.
Her fancy hears his spirit wail,
His moan upon the dying gale ;
But still she deems some friendly power 1935
Will loose his chains in happier hour,
And lead the warrior's manly charms
To his lone bride's expecting arms :
On future bliss her hopes rely,
And a smile lights the mourner's eye. 1940
The maid had left the joyous court
To watch in this obscure resort,
Lonely and strange, and feed her mind
With phantasies of saddest kind.
The king, in pity for her woes, 1945
To soothe her bosom's wandering throes,
Had warn'd that no intrusive eye

Should steal upon her privacy.

Here oft the lovely mourner staid

Till the deep close of evening shade;

1950

Here oft in solitude secure

Wasted the tedious nightly hour.

And now her parting lips unclose,

Warbling the tale of fancied foes;

While the dark-foaming rocks around

1955

Pour the wild echo's plaintive sound.

The sweet and melancholy strain

Steals slowly over hill and plain;

It mourns upon the passing gale,

It winds along the narrow vale,

1960

And now it strikes the listening ear

Of Asbiorn in that forest drear.

“ Return, my love, return and see

“ The bridal couch is spread for thee!

“ For thee reserved the tender kiss,

1965

“ The melting pledge of promised bliss !

“ For thee my willing hands entwine

“ The blushing rose and chaaste woodbine,

“ The violet and primrose pale,

“ The modest lily of the vale !

1970

“ Wild flowers around my bower are growing,

“ And strains of sweetest music flowing ;

“ Return, my love, return and see

“ The bridal couch is spread for thee !

“ O place me by some rippling stream,

1975

“ Where I may softly sleep and dream !

“ And let my airy harp be laid

“ Under the willow’s mournful shade ;

“ That every breeze which summer brings,

“ Sweeping its sweet accordant strings,

1980

“ May some wild strain of music borrow

“ And waft the tenderest notes of sorrow :

“ Return, my love, return and see

“ The bridal couch is spread for thee!

“ Cold is the bed where Helga lies,

1985

“ And chaste and true thine Helga dies.

“ On her pale cheek the dews descend,

“ And cypress boughs around her bend ;

“ The weeping Elves shall strew her grave

“ Beside the slowly gliding wave.

1990

“ Then, ere beneath the mournful willow

“ The damp earth be thine Helga’s pillow,

“ Return, my love, return and see

“ The bridal couch is spread for thee !”

Young Asbiorn paused ; and, as his ear

1995

Drank the clear strain that floated near

On Eve’s calm wing, his pensive eye

Seem’d lit by sudden witchery :

While love, impetuous, unrestrain’d,

In his hot pulse and sinews reign’d ;

2000

And something fiercer than despair

To hear his friend her only care,
And that joy-kindling voice, that bade
His rival to her lonely shade.

The warrior from his steed has bounded ; 2005
Beneath his tread the steps have sounded ;
And he has reach'd the virgin bower
Of that sad maid in luckless hour ;
And soon he placed him by her side,
And named her as his wedded bride, 2010
And whisper'd much of faith and truth,
Of promised joys and meeting youth.
She smiled and wept, and wept and smiled,
By momentary bliss beguiled ;
Then glanced her wild enquiring eye, 2015
And her breast heaved a doubtful sigh ;
A mist before her sight was spread,
And the faint sparks of reason fled.
'The gazing look could not discern,

Nor the bewilder'd memory learn, 2020

Whether in truth her honor'd lord
Return'd to claim her plighted word,
Or whether warrior strange and rude,
Breathing deceit, before her stood.

Her mantling blushes kindled bright, 2025
And straight her cheek was wan and white.

She stirr'd not, but her hurried glance
Shew'd life was in the speechless trance ;
Then with a shriek, that seem'd to break
Life's tenement so frail and weak, 2030
She, starting wildly from her seat,
Fell senseless at the warrior's feet.

If there are kindred spirits sent
By Heaven upon man's welfare bent,
With him his mortal race to run, 2035
Their web of fate together spun ;
If there are guardian powers on earth
That tend the helpless infant's birth,

And close behind him tread unseen
 Through life's dark ways and varied scene, 2040
 To guide aright his erring will,
 And wrestle with the powers of ill ;
 O, some pure form its arm extend,
 And o'er the fallen Helga bend !

The chaste disorder'd robe compose, 2045
 Whose ruffled folds her charms disclose !
 Nor let unhallow'd thoughts assail
 The beauties hid by modest veil !

I know not whether Helga lay
 In speechless trance till morrow's ray ; 2050
 For twilight's gloom was gathering fast,
 The day's last beam was quickly past,
 And the dark mantle of the night
 Closed on the warrior's rapturous sight :
 But the sun lit the forests tall 2055
 Long ere he reach'd king Ingva's hall.

END OF CANTO V.

H E L G A.

CANTO VI.



CANTO VI.

YESTRENE the mountain's rugged brow
Was mantled o'er with dreary snow;
The sun sat red behind the hill,
And every breath of wind was still: 2060
But ere he rose, the southern blast
A veil o'er heaven's blue arch had cast,
Thick roll'd the clouds, and genial rain
Pour'd the wide deluge o'er the plain.
Fair glens and verdant vales appear, 2065
And warmth awakes the budding year.

O 'tis the touch of fairy hand
That wakes the spring of northern land!
It warms not there by slow degrees,
With changeful pulse, the uncertain breeze; 2070
But sudden on the wondering sight
Bursts forth the beam of living light,
And instant verdure springs around,
And magic flowers bedeck the ground.
Return'd from regions far away 2075
The red-wing'd throstle pours his lay;
The soaring snipe salutes the spring,
While the breeze whistles through his wing;
And, as he hails the melting snows,
The heathcock claps his wings and crows. 2080
Bright shines the sun on Sigtune's towers,
And Spring leads on the fragrant hours.
The ice is loosed, and prosperous gales
Already fill the strutting sails.

Young Asbiorn looks to East and West, 2085
His heart with anxious cares opprest :
He looks to spy if far or near
Hialmar's towering crest appear ;
But still, as day succeeds to day,
He lingers on his distant way, 2090
While Rumor shapes a thousand tales,
And each vague fame in turn prevails.
Wearied and vex'd, old Ingva brooks
Impatient Asbiorn's ireful looks,
The bold reproach, the fitful fire 2095
Of young and passionate desire,
The proud request repeated still,
The challenge, and the threat of ill.
Nor Orvarod likes his friend's delay ;
He pants to join the arduous fray ; 2100
And tow'rds the neighbouring port he hies,
Where moor'd the well-rigg'd vessel lies.

When, lo! he views with hasty stride
 Toiling a gallant warrior's pride :
 Hialmar's princely port he knows, 2105
 And crest, the dread of Sweden's foes.
 High towers his helm, and from his hand
 Gleams far the wonderous elfish brand,
 As swift he speeds tow'rds Sigtune's tower:
 One sweet farewell in Helga's bower 2110
 He seeks, nor heeds the fleeting hour.
 But Orvarod sternly chides his friend :
 " Love must," he cries, " to honor bend.
 " Long has the zephyr fill'd our sails,
 " The mariner greets the favoring gales. 2115
 " E'en now on Samsoe's dreary coast
 " Angantyr and his savage host
 " Insulting mock our long delay,
 " And wanton in the eye of day.
 " Thou strive a love-sick maid to please ! 2120

“ Waste thy soft hours in silken ease !

“ Go, change for pleasure’s rosy crown

“ Life’s worth, the palm of fair renown !

“ I stem the seas ; where honor calls

“ Undaunted Orvarod wins or falls.

2125

“ Fair deeds be mine, and deathless praise,

“ And victory’s never-fading bays !”

Most scornfully the hero spoke ;

Rough were his words, and fierce his look.

O’er young Hialmar’s haughty face

2130

A flush like anger seem’d to pass,

Or pride, that struggled high with shame,

And conscious thoughts not free from blame.

’Tis passing hard for lovers true

To part without one sweet adieu !

2135

To part, perchance to meet no more,

And distant lands and seas explore,

Nor bless again the longing sight

With the heart's fancy and delight!
 One instant glance, one lingering kiss
 Seems worth whole years of future bliss;
 One tender pledge mid fond tears given
 Dearer than all the hopes of heaven.

High conflict rent the chieftain's heart,
 From all he prized unseen to part; 2145
 But Honor calls, imperious name,
 The gem of life, the warrior's fame.
 One thought he murmur'd, and no more,
 "Orvarod, thou wrong'st me!" to the shore
 Then turn'd his dark expressive eye, 2150
 And onward moved right mournfully.
 They came to where the surges beat
 O'er the rude rocks of Agnafit,
 And soon unlash'd the ready keel;
 The sails are full, the waters swell; 2155
 And fast they cleave the dashing spray,

And o'er the billows win their way ;
Nor long their course : where Samsoe's isle
Rears its dark form, a dreary pile,
Their anchor bites the yellow sand ; 2160
The heroes spring upon the strand.
They gaze around ; within the bay
A Danish bark at moorings lay,
Half hid behind a jutting rock,
Round which the frothy waters broke ; 2165
And boldly swelling from the shore
Stretch'd wide around a barren moor.
They climb the toilsome height, to view
The vessel and her gallant crew.
I ween they had not paced a rood, 2170
When close beside Hialmar stood,
On steeds that seem'd as fleet as light,
Six maids in complete armour dight.
Their chargers of ethereal birth

Paw'd with impatient hoof the earth,

2175

And snorting fiercely gan to neigh,

As if they heard the battle bray,

And burn'd to join the bloody fray.

But they unmoved and silent sate,

With pensive brow and look sedate;

2180

Proudly each couch'd her glittering spear,

And seem'd to know nor hope nor fear :

So mildly firm their placid air,

So resolute, yet heavenly fair.

But not one ray of pity's beam

2185

From their dark eyelids seem'd to gleam ;

Nor gentle mercy's melting tear,

Nor love might ever harbour there :

Was never beauteous woman's face

So stern and yet so passionless !

2190

They spake not, but in proud array

Moved onward, and a glorious ray

From their dark lashes as they pass'd
Full on Hialmar's face they cast.

Then wheeling round in gorgeous pride
They paused, and thus the foremost cried.

“ Praise to the slain on battle plain !

“ Glory to Odin's deathless train !

“ They shall not sink in worthless ease

“ Wasted by age or fell disease.

2200

“ In the bright chambers of the brave

“ Gladly they wield the conquering glaive,

“ Quaff the rich draught of gods, and hear

“ The applauding thunders rolling near.

“ Haste, Odin, haste ! the bowl prepare !

2205

“ Man shall the glittering beverage share !

“ Thy messengers of fate prevail !

“ Hail to thy guest, high Odin, hail !”

She said ; and spurring each her steed

O'er the dark moor they quickly sped.

2210

Hialmar heard the fatal call,
 Foredoom'd perchance in youth to fall;
 And mark'd with sad presaging eye
 The visionary warriors fly.
 They seem'd not as they pass'd to fling 2215
 The dewdrop from the humble ling ;
 The heath-cock sprang not from his seat,
 Nor bow'd the gorse beneath their feet.
 Bold Orvarod heard, though fast behind,
 No voice save of the sighing wind ; 2220
 Nor living form could he discern,
 Save the deer bounding from the fern.
 Him with slow voice and solemn look
 His mournful comrade thus bespoke.

“ Yestrene as on the poop we lay, 2225
 “ I watch'd the sun's declining ray.
 “ In splendid form his glories shone,
 “ And all the welkin seem'd his own.

“ Most radiant was the course he ran,
“ Dimm’d by no cloud since morn began; 2230
“ And the smooth lap of ocean’s tide
“ Blushing received him, as a bride
“ All-beauteous and serenely fair,
“ With glowing cheek and golden hair.
“ I saw, and hoped like him to rest 2235
“ With glory crown’d on beauty’s breast;
“ I hail’d the omen bright and dear,
“ And thought the hour of rapture near.
“ But heaven forbids; these longing eyes
“ Must never more behold the prize, 2240
“ Which my heart pants for! on the shore,
“ Where the wild Baltic billows roar,
“ Hopeless of love’s delightful meed,
“ Orvarod, thy friend must fall and bleed!
“ Yet not Angantyr’s force I fear,
“ But Gondula’s immortal spear. 2245

“ I see the stern Valkyriur nigh
 “ All arm’d, and pointing to the sky :
 “ Virgins of fate, that chuse the slain,
 “ They bid me hence to Odin’s train.”

2250

Fierce Orvarod smiled with scornful mind,
 To his friend’s feelings little kind ;
 Deem’d him unnerved by woman’s love,
 And roughly gan his words reprove.

“ Curse on the dimpled cheek,” he cried, 2255
 “ That half unmans my comrade’s pride !
 “ Not Odin’s maid shall bow thy crest,
 “ But the soft woman in thy breast.
 “ Behold yon orb, whose sitting beam
 “ Sooth’d thy fond bosom’s wayward dream ! 2260
 “ See his bright steeds with equal pace
 “ Pursue their never-tiring race.
 “ They waste not in the morning’s bower
 “ Mid dewy wreaths the fragrant hour ;

“ But ever at the call of day 2265
“ Spring forth and win their glittering way :
“ Though storms assail their radiant heads,
“ Eternal splendour round them spreads ;
“ Onward the wheels of glory roll ;
“ They pant, and struggle to the goal. 2270
“ And thou, like them, my fere, pursue
“ Thy course to fame and honor true.
“ All hopes beside are little worth,
“ Man walks in sorrow from his birth ;
“ The fleeting charms that round him move 2275
“ Are vain, and chief frail woman’s love.
“ Fate comes at last, and then the brave
“ To glory spring beyond the grave ;
“ With Odin quaff the godlike bowl,
“ While round their feet the thunders roll, 2280
“ And in bright fields of azure light
“ Each day renew the blissful fight,

“ And joyous with immortal hand

“ Thrust the strong lance and wave the brand.”

Scarce had he spoke, when on the shore 2285

They heard the Danish champions roar,

Wielding their clubs, and with fierce glee

Already brawling victory.

Resistless, rushing fierce, they came,

Like those huge elks of mighty frame, 2290

That oft by Ifa’s echoing flood,

Or hill-crown’d Bergen’s tangled wood,

Wake the wild echoes with their cry,

And through the crashing forest hie :

Foremost Angantyr rush’d, to view

More dire than all that savage crew.

He seem’d some angel of dismay

Scattering dread terror on his way,

Some flaming minister of wrath

With vengeful power the world to scath. 2300

Bare was his breast, his forehead bare;
Nor habergeon of tissue rare,
Vanbrass nor gauntlet there did shine,
Nor helm, nor trusty brigandine.

What need that wonderous son of might

2305

His limbs with iron harness dight,
Whom native strength, gigantic power,
Might match with gods in deadly stour!

With placid eye and tranquil mien

Hialmar views the fearful scene,

2310

Firm fix'd, and dauntless to abide

The arm of strength, the brow of pride.

As one embark'd in high emprise

On which hangs fame and dearer joys,

And life, but valued for the meed

2315

To glory and to love decreed;

Nor scornful, nor appall'd, his form

Radiant and fearless fronts the storm.

"Odin," he cries, "I hear thy call!
 Hialmar's strength foreknows its fall; 2320
 And each dear vision of delight
 Is fading from my hopeless sight;
 But yet, stern God, uphold my might!
 If I must draw my latest breath,
 Grant me but victory in death, 2325
 And spare the virgin's gentle charms
 From the rude force of foreign arms!"

 He spoke, and from its scabbard drew
 His fairy brand of changeful hue.
 Was never trenchant blade so bright; 2330
 It glitter'd like a beam of light.
 There was calm valor in his air,
 And high resolve and proud despair;
 The thought that looks beyond the tomb,
 The firmness that provokes its doom. 2335

 Then kindled Orvarod's dark eye,

As it was wont when strife was nigh;
Like the gaunt eagle that surveys
With dauntless joy the lightning's blaze,
And, while the pitiless tempests beat

2340

With wild uproar his rocky seat,
Flaps his strong wings with fierce delight,
And screaming hails the storms of night.

O, 'twas a gallant sight to see
Those proud twin stars of chivalry,
As down the steep they boldly move
Gainst fearful odds their might to prove!

2345

" My single arm" (bold Orvarod cried)
" With that fell chief in fight he tried !
" Thy sword, my friend, may reave of life
" His brothers in the deadly strife."
To him Hialmar proud replied,
" Angantyr was by me defied ;
" Nor shall he bend to other hand,

2350

" Nor bow his head to other brand. 2355

" O where, or in what dreadful hour,

" Orvarod, hast thou shewn loftier power?

" Hast thou more firm in peril stood,

" Or died thy sword with nobler blood?

" Come the fierce champion, like the blast 2360

" Of heaven with lowering storm o'ercast!

" To me was love's high prize decreed;

" For that shall bold Hialmar bleed."

He cried, and o'er his valiant head

Waved high in air his flaming blade,

Breathing defiance; while he spoke,

The ruffian Dane with fury shook,

E'en as he mark'd the boastful word

Deep graven on the magic sword.

He paused not with bold speech to throw

A brave defiance at the foe,

But waxing fierce with scorn and hate

2365

2370

Strove by one blow to close his fate,
And headlong at Hialmar's face
Wielded amain his ponderous mace. 2375

The rock that breasts the thundering main
Might ill such furious shock sustain,
But swift as thought yon crest of pride
Shuns the dire blow and springs aside,
While the slant falchion deftly cleaves 2380

The fearful weight its edge receives.
Hissing in air the fragment flies,
On earth the headlong champion lies :
His furious unresisted hand,
By weight o'erborne, has struck the sand. 2385

O, say, did bray Hialmar's blade
Glitter like lightning o'er his head ?
Is the swift stroke of vengeance sped ?
That arm ne'er smote a fallen foe !
Ne'er hath it dealt a coward blow ! 2390

Collected, mild, with radiant eyes,
 He bids the impetuous champion rise,
 Fix his firm foot to earth, and wait
 With strength entire the stroke of fate.

Fiercer, thus foil'd, the giant hand 2395

Bright Tirfing grasp'd, his ponderous brand ;
 Portentous weapon, which of yore
 His sire from Odin's offspring tore ;
 What time, her valiant father slain,
 He joy'd Eyrora's charms to gain, 2400
 Sad mother of that giant brood
 Mid shrieks of slaughter fiercely woo'd.

Dark is the tempest of his brow,
 His flashing eyes their hate avow,
 While conscious fury nerves his might, 2405
 To madness roused with vengeful spite.
 High o'er each head the falchions gleam,
 From each keen blade the lightnings stream.

O ! dreadful was the strife which then
Began between the first of men !

2410

But, as the brothers huge came nigh,
Sudden has Orvarod turn'd to fly.

To fly ! O never in the field
Before that hour did Orvarod yield,
Nor ever did his heart appear

2415

To know the withering breath of fear ;
He has stood foremost in the blast
Of battle, when all hope seem'd past,

And turn'd the bloody tide of war

Wielding his dauntless scimitar :

2420

But now he flies ! the savage crew,
Shouting with hideous joy, pursue ;
While striving singly on the strand

Angantyr and Hialmar stand.

Headlong they follow ; but the Swede,
Nimbler, outstrips them all in speed ;

2425

And they with vague unequal pace,
Like baffled hounds, toil in the chace.

Sudden he turns, as if to view
With various speed the foe pursue.

His bow is bent, and from the string
Behold the unerring arrow spring !

Loud twangs the cord ! again ! again !
Proud Semingar has bit the plain,

Barri and Hervardur are slain !

Another whizzing shaft is sped !

Reitner, it strikes thy towering head !

Ah ! what avails thy peerless strength,

Thy matchless weapon's weight and length ;

For, ere thy hand can deal the blow,

Thou fall'st before a flying foe :

Again it sounds ; the feather'd dart

Quivers in Brani's fearless heart.

Short is the race those warriors run ;

2430

2435

2440

They fall unpitied, one by one; 2445

Writhing upon the barren moor

They lie in blood to rise no more,

Nor one of all that kindred train

Shall ever see their native plain.

But he, the conqueror, firm and slow 2450

Treads backward mid the dying foe,

To view beside the surgy main

His fere the arduous strife maintain.

He seats him there in silent pride

By the blue ocean's swelling tide, 2455

And sees each fierce alternate blow

Dealt furiously by either foe.

The champion strives, but wastes his might,

While maddening fury blinds his sight;

He smites, and dire the weapon's weight; 2460

But his lithe foeman shuns his fate,

Watches that ponderous arm, and still

Scapes the death-stroke by nimbler skill;

And swift, where'er the giant turns,

In his gall'd flesh the falchion burns.

2465

The champion bleeds apace, but still

Hialmar seems to fare as ill.

His casque is riven : o'er his brow,

Clotted with blood, the ringlets flow;

And on his breast a gory star

2470

Marks the fell stroke of ruthless war.

Wearied with strife and faint the twain

Weakly and ill the fight sustain.

But on the breathless verge of fate

Angantyr glow'd with shame and hate,

2475

And, gathering all his strength and pride,

One last but fatal effort tried.

Both arms upraised, his ponderous brand

He wielded high with either hand ;

The keen point smote Hialmar's crest,

2480

Glanced from his helm, and gored his breast.

But, as Angantyr struck, the blood
Gush'd from his side with hastier flood,
And that proud effort seem'd to force •

Life's current from its inmost source.

2485

He reels, he staggers ; on the shore
His length distended lies in gore,
Gigantic ; like a stately mast
On the bleak coast by tempest cast,
Shatter'd in battle from the deck

2490

Of some huge ship, a bloodstain'd wreck,
O'er which the foaming surges break.

In Ledra's court the serfs shall hear
With joy the fate of him they fear,
Whose violent force and wayward arm
To friend or foe work'd equal harm ;
No tender maid shall mourn his fall
In secret bower or lordly hall,

2495

Nor e'en Eyvora drop a tear
To grace her son's abhorred bier : 2500
He lies unpitied, unrevered,
And curs'd by whom he once was fear'd.
But that proud youth in battle bless'd,
Who bow'd to dust the giant crest,
Say, does he lift the swelling sail, 2505
And love's rich prize with rapture hail ?
Does his high port, and haughty eye
Proclaim the tale of victory ?
Dim, dim those lights whence joy has flow'd,
Where Love has beam'd and valor glow'd ! 2510
How weakly throbs the pulse of pride !
How sinks you arm with life's-blood died !
Those limbs his frame but ill sustain,
And all his flattering dreams are vain.
Behold him sink upon the strand, 2515
His sword's point buried in the sand !

O'er his wan cheek a ghastly hue
Steals slowly, wet with death's cold dew.
Fix'd on his friend his glassy eye
Seeks one fond beam of sympathy ;
And thus despairing, fraught with love,
His last sad accents feebly move.

“ Orvarod, the arm of fate prevails;
“ Hialmar's hope and glory fails.
“ The day shall dawn on Sweden's hills,
“ And gild with joy her sparkling rills;
“ The wild flowers in her forests green
“ Shall laugh amidst the genial scene ;
“ And blithe to hail the morning ray
“ The birds ring out their vernal lay :
“ But cold and stark thy friend shall lie,
“ Nor hear their music warbling nigh,
“ Nor raise to light the sparkling eye.
“ Thou bear me to my native land,

2520

2525

2530

" From dreary Samsoe's fatal strand ; 2535
 " Place my cold limbs by Helga's side,
 " My hope in life, in death my bride !
 " For, O ! that perfect form, mature
 " With every grace that can allure,
 " Shall wither in its prime, and fall 2540
 " When hapless love and duty call ;
 " And scarce shall live to shed a tear
 " O'er young Hialmar's honor'd bier.
 " Thou, Orvarod, bid our ashes rest
 " In one cold mound, together blest ; 2545
 " And let the Scalds their music raise
 " To thy friend's peace and Helga's praise."
 He ceased ; nor ceased the voice alone ;
 The pulse is still, the feeling gone.
 From the frail trunk of mortal clay 2550
 His spirit soars to brighter day ;
 And those resplendent Maids of war

Through misty regions of mid air,
Where fleeting meteors gleam and die,
And through yon pure empyreal sky, 2555
Mid thousand orbs of radiant light
And suns with ceaseless splendor bright,
Guide him, to where, with fixed eye,
Amid the blaze of majesty,
Ecstatic Wonder sits alone, 2560
Near the immortal thunderous throne.
There, shrined in glory, he descries
Odin, high ruler of the skies ;
By whom two coal-black ravens sit,
Memory and Observation hight. 2565
On never-tiring pinion borne
The wonderous pair go forth at morn ;
Through boundless space each day they sail,
At eve return to tell their tale,
And whisper soft in Odin's ear 2570

The secrets of each rolling sphere.

Beneath the proud pavilion laid

On the high dais the feast is spread;

And there alike in pomp divine

Heroes and blissful Powers recline.

2575

There sits Heimdallar, God of light,

Robed in pure garb of lustrous white.

He, from nine wonderous virgins born,

Blows loud his bright celestial horn;

The golden horn, whose magic sound

2580

Is heard by every world around,

Waking to life each thing that grows,

Each form that breathes, each rill that flows.

He hears each floweret burst the bud,

Each vapor rising from the flood;

2585

His ear can mark the springing grass,

The silent waters slowly pass;

The curls that grace the snowy neck,

The down that blooms on woman's cheek.

And there Iduna, Queen of youth, 2590

With blushing face and rosy mouth,

Breathing sweet health; behold her bear,

In a rich casket pure and fair,

That fragrant fruit of loveliest hue,

Sprinkled with heaven's immortal dew, 2595

Which tasted makes the wrinkled brow

Again like polish'd ivory glow!

And, near, her spouse, to whom belong

The warblings of each liquid song,

Braga, by bards adored; and he, 2600

The blood-stain'd lord of victory,

All-glorious Tyr, in battle crown'd;

And Thor, for courage high renown'd.

There sits Niorder, at whose voice

The unfetter'd waves and winds rejoice; 2605

There Skáda chaste, his mountain bride,

And Freyr, by whose all-bounteous side

Stands smiling peace to wealth allied :

And, near, his sister's blooming form,

With kindling love and beauty warm,

2610

Freyia, from whom flows every bliss,

The willing smile, the melting kiss.

Voluptuous fragrance round her breathes,

Her brows are twined with perfumed wreaths ;

And round her neck of living snow

2615

Rich gems in magic order glow,

Strung by the hand of young Desire,

And bright with Love's own blessed fire.

There silent Vidar, whose delight

Is the still gloom of peaceful night ;

2620

Who loves to haunt the margin green

Of some calm lake the rocks between,

And mark the lingering beam of day

Yield slowly to the twilight grey :

Beneath the willow's shadowy bower 2625

Alone he spends the pensive hour.

There wise Forseti, judge of right;

And he, whose wonderous infant might

Slew hateful Hauder reft of sight,

Vali, whom erst to Odin's power 2630

The ruddy Sun's bright daughter bore,

Chaste Rinda; and the selfsame night

Saw his proud deeds, the baleful light

Of pyre funereal, and the slain

Borne in slow pomp along the plain, 2635

The curse of Gods, loved Balder's bane.

And he, at heaven's extremest verge,

Who broods o'er Ocean's swelling surge

With giant form, and frequent flings

The tempest from his eagle wings: 2640

And that dark Power, whose ample shield

Before the Sun's bright face is held,

Screening from flame the liquid main,
Each shadowy hill and grassy plain.

Nor these alone, but all who boast
Of might in heaven's ambrosial host,
And they whoe'er in battle slain
Did once on earth high honor gain.

The radiant Maids, whom oft the Lord
Of war sends forth with lance and sword, 2645
There pour the mead and deck the board.

Glitters like fire the shining hall ;
Helmets and banners deck the wall ;
Of lances huge the dome is made,
And thousand shields above are spread : 2650

The benches, bright as burnish'd gold,
Are strewn with mail of warriors bold.

There shall they quaff the fragrant bowl ;
Till round the flames of Surtur-roll,
And the gold horn shall wake the Gods 2655

To war, from all their blest abodes ;
In vain, for two alone shall live
To tell how fiends with Odin strive,
Vidar and Vali ; for the day
Shall come, when gods shall lose their sway,

2665

When heaven itself shall melt away,
And, her dread banners wide unfurld,
Confusion stalk around the world.

Three long continuous winters past
Without one beam of radiance cast,

2670

Around shall roar the fiery blast,
And gods shall fall ; the flaming storm
Shall wither every living form ;
But Might and Majesty shall stand
Stilling the strife with armed hand,
And, when old Odin's glories fail,
Silence and Strength alone prevail.

2075

Now firm in war, to honor true,

Hialmar joins the blissful crew.

To meet him heaven's all-powerful Sire 2680

And all that bright celestial choir

Rise from their thrones of light ; but he,

Drawn back by mournful sympathy,

Looks piteous down on Helga's bower,

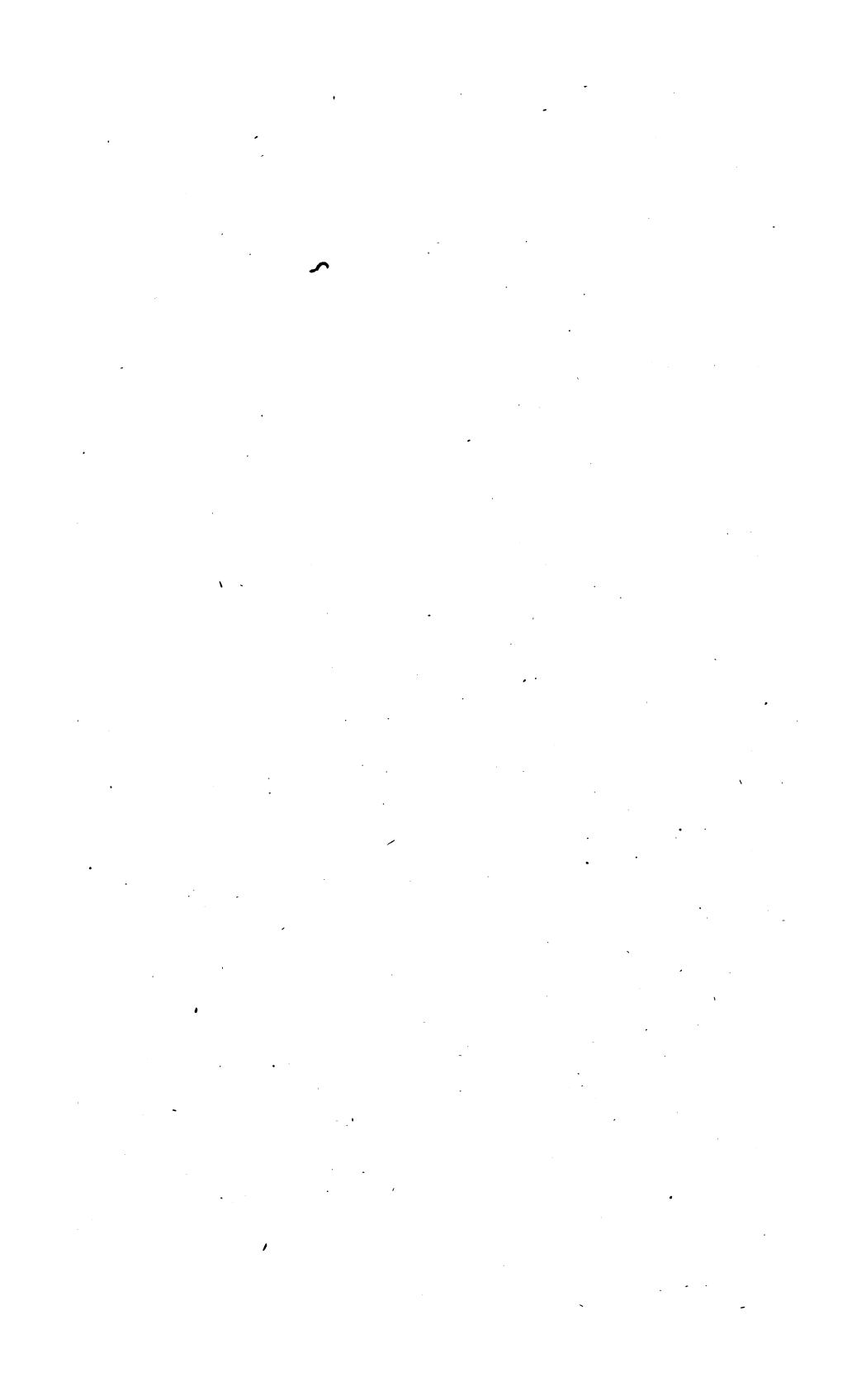
And casts one glance on Samsoe's shore, 2685

Where lie his cold remains in gore.

END OF CANTO VI.

H E L G A.

CANTO VII.



CANTO VII.

SAY, when the spirit fleets away
From its frail house of mortal clay,
When the cold limbs to earth return,
Or rest in proudly sculptur'd urn,
Does still oblivion quench the fire
That warm'd the heart with chaste desire ?
Do all our fond affections lie
Buried in dark eternity ?
Or may the souls of those we love
In darkness oft around us move,

2690

2695

Float on the gently sighing air,
And haunt the scenes where once they were ?
It may not be that flame so bright
Should ever sink in endless night ; 2700
And if, when fails the transient breath,
The soul can spurn the bonds of death,
Love's gentle spirit ne'er shall die,
But dove-like with it mount the sky !

O 'tis not sure the poet's dream, 2705
Sweet fancy's visionary theme.
Where'er the fleeting soul shall go,
Still will our pure affections glow !

If sense of good and ill remain
Though life's frail thoughts are past and vain, 2710
Death's arm, that conquers all, shall ne'er
From the delighted spirit tear
The memory of a mother's care !

That fond remembrance still shall cling

In heaven to life's immortal spring ! 2715

And thou, whose chaste and beauteous form,

Clasp'd to his heart with rapture warm,

Oft wakes the humble poet's eye

To more than mortal ecstasy,

Whose blooming cherubs, gifts of love,

2720

In sportive innocence round him move,

Say, does he dream ! shall joy like this

Pass as a shadowy scene of bliss ?

Or, when that beauteous form shall fade,

And his cold tongue in dust be laid,

2725

Shall the fond spirits ever glow

With love together link'd as now ?

It is not false ! Love's subtle fire

Shall live, though mortal limbs expire !

E'en now from heaven's ethereal height

2730

Hialmar turns his wistful sight

To Sigtune's towers, where, bathed in tears,

Mid anxious hopes and throbbing fears,

He sees the lovely mourner lie

With pallid cheek and languid eye.

2735

Ne'er shall her bold victorious lord

Return to breathe the blissful word ;

By Samsoe's rocks his body lies,

To love a bleeding sacrifice :

And pensive there, though aid is vain,

2740

And past the poignant throb of pain,

Friendship bends sadly to survey

The wan cold form and lifeless clay.

In the wild centre of the isle

Bold Orvarod heap'd a gloomy pile.

2745

The vast and dreary mound look'd o'er

The foaming sea and desert moor.

Of huge rough stones in order rear'd,

Within, a hideous vault appear'd ;

Above he piled the barren mould

2750

Dug in that region bleak and cold,
And on the summit placed alone
A strangely graven Runic stone.
He did not give, so runs the fame,
The hostile bodies to the flame,
But ranged, in that dark tomb below,
Their ghastly forms in frightful row ;
Beneath Angantyr's giant head
Tirfing, his magic sword, was laid,
And by each livid brother's side
His weapon oft in battle tried.
The shepherd will not chuse at eve
To wander near that baleful grave,
Where oft, if story tells aright,
Streams forth the glare of wonderous light,
And round the stony summit grey
The tremulous flame is seen to play.
The mariner spies the dreadful mark,

2755

2760

2765

And silent steers aloof his bark.

But slain Hialmar does not rest

2770

With them on Samsoe's eyrie waste;

Nor him did there his friend entomb

In that dread vault's abhorred gloom.

His limbs, embalm'd with precious care,

Slow to the ship his vassals bear.

2775

On a rich pall the chief is laid,

Clad in bright steel, with helmed head;

The iron gauntlet on his hand,

And in its grasp the elfish brand.

He seems like living there to lie,

2780

Save the wan cheek and rayless eye.

Slow moving with the glassy tide

Behold the stately vessel glide !

The air is calm ; the sky serene,

Reflected on the waters sheen,

2785

Throws its blue mantle o'er the deep,

And the scarce-heaving billows sleep.
Beauteous she wins her noiseless way,
Nor dashes from her poop the spray,
Nor lets in air her streamers play.

2790

Around, the sun's last splendors fade,
And gently falls mild evening's shade.

Then, as she nears the Swedish shore,
Steals softly o'er the waters hoar,
Borne with sweet breath on dewy wing,

2795

The fragrance of the blooming spring.
Young Asbiorn treads the yellow sand,
Where rippling surges bathe the land.

Long had he mark'd the silvery sail
Gliding beneath the moonbeam pale.

2800

His heart by various passions rent
Throbs high to learn the strife's event,
And panting almost dreads to see
The youth return with victory.

How shall that tongue that breath'd deceit 2805
 His fere with generous welcome greet?
 How shall he dare his glance to meet?
 Who, sworn to guard his comrade's right
 In peace, in peril, and in fight;
 Before him like a shield to stand, 2810
 To save him with a brother's hand;
 Yet, touch'd by passion, basely strove
 To rob him of his treasured love;
 To blast his soul's delight, and spoil
 The beauteous guerdon of his toil. 2815
 Short is the bliss of sinful mind,
 Its raptures leave their sting behind;
 The rankling wound, the conscious thought,
 And shame with secret misery fraught.
 Restless he treads the frothy sand, 2820
 While the light shallop gains the land;
 Nor long before his anxious eye

Woe's gloomy banners may descry.

The gorgeous signs of death appear,

The funeral pall, the pompous bier.

2825

He sees ; he hears the grievous tale,

His comrade's glory and his fall ;

Views his pale form and nerveless hands,

And fix'd with conscious horror stands.

Awe-struck he seems, like one distraught

2830

By dark remorse and torturing thought,

Grasps Orvarod's hand with speechless pain,

And downcast joins the solemn train.

Onward with silent steps and slow

Behold the sad procession go !

2835

O'er yellow sands whose level edge

Is stretch'd beside the rocky ledge,

Through wilds with vernal fragrance breathing,

Through flowery shades their sweet boughs wreathing,

And many a dew-bespangled brake

2840

Where lone the plaintive night-birds wake,
Lit by the moon's serenest ray
To Helga's bower they bend their way ;
And by the willow-bounded stream,
Where beauteous plays the silvery beam,
As now with solemn pace they go,
Steals on the ear her voice of woe,
And it comes floating on the breeze
Like the sweet calm of summer seas.

“ Hard is the hopeless damsel's lot, 2845
“ At eve adored, at morn forgot !
“ Man reaps with pride the blissful hour,
“ Then leaves in woe the wither'd flower.
“ Nay, tell me nought of faithful loves,
“ Of joys that Heaven itself approves ; 2855
“ Nay, feign not tales of fond despair ;
“ Man's faith is light as summer air.
“ O gin ye climb the mountain's height,

“ The quarry slain shall yield delight,

“ And, as ye rouse each lair with glee,

2860

“ Blithe pleasure chase each thought of me !

“ O gin ye seek the greenwood gay,

“ Each lingering care shall melt away !

“ Mid sports, where feather'd game doth lie,

“ Shall love's frail passion quickly die.

2865

“ The nymph forlorn may mourn the hour

“ That gave to woe her short-lived flower ;

“ In silent tears may waste the day,

“ And pour by night her plaintive lay.”

The strain was hush'd ; and now they stood

2870

Silent beneath the embowering wood,

Where many a tendril twining sweet

Cluster'd fair Helga's wild retreat.

Stern Orvarod listening waited near

His pale and breathless comrade's bier ;

2875

Then with stout arm he raised upright

The corpse in shining armour dight.

One moment in his tough embrace

He held the wan form face to face,

And gazed thereon most wistfully ;

2880

While those, who wondering there stood nigh,

Thought a tear swell'd his glistening eye ;

But never pity's dewdrop weak

Stole down that proud and martial cheek.

Then without word, or sign, or geat,

2885

To make his meaning manifest,

He bore it, sheath'd in warlike steel,

As if alive to breathe and feel,

Though ghastly was the hue, and dread

The visage of the speechless dead.

2890

Thus burthen'd, to the lone abode

Of that despairing nymph he strode,

And entering, sudden as the shock

Of heaven that rives the clay cold rock,

To the sad mourner's grief-full side 2895
With unrelenting purpose hied ;
And, rooted in the strong belief
That woman's love is frail and brief,
(While as with wild distracted mind
On her lone couch the Fair reclined) 2900
To her astonished eye display'd
The features of the ghastly dead ;
On her white bosom throbbing warm
Placed her wan lord's disfigured form,
And silent, sternly gazing, press'd 2905
The icy gauntlet to her breast.
O ! it came o'er her like a blast
Withering life's blossom as it pass'd,
A frightful overwhelming flood
Nor seen, nor felt, nor understood ; 2910
It chill'd her heart, and then it burn'd
As memory and sense return'd,

And like a horrid dream the past
Came rushing o'er her soul at last.

She knew those features pale in death,

2915

And look'd, and seem'd to drink his breath;

But, dared not lay her cheek to his,

Nor print on his cold lips a kiss;

Nor did she with one sad embrace

Her lord's beloved relics press;

2920

But, all unconscious of the crowd

That mute and wondering round her stood,

And horror-struck, with fixed eye

She gazed on Asbiorn dreadfully.

It was a look that chill'd his blood,

2925

And seem'd to freeze life's secret flood:

And she was dead and cold as stone,

Her spirit pass'd without a groan;

But her dread look and glazed eye

Still fix'd him as in agony:

2930

Nor ever from that dreadful hour
Sentence or word spake Asbiorn more.
With many a sigh and many a tear
They placed her on Hialmar's bier,
And to one melancholy grave 2935
They bore the beauteous and the brave.
Sad Asbiorn follow'd, and behind
Stepp'd slow with self-corroded mind ;
He saw them render'd to the earth
That gave their pride and beauty birth ; 2940
He mark'd the monumental heap
Piled o'er the limbs that silent sleep ;
He saw without a tear or groan
Fix'd on its top the Runic stone :
Then on the gloomy mound he placed 2945
The sword that long his side had graced,
And, falling on the edge, he press'd
Its death-point through his manly breast.

Well may old Ingva wail, and tear
The honors of his hoary hair; 2950

While Sweden's loveliest virgins spread
Fresh flowers to deck the honor'd dead,
And warlike Scalds bid gently flow
From their gold harps the notes of woe;
Not that such duties sadly paid 2955

May hope to soothe the silent shade;
Not that the plaint or pious wreath
Can charm the dull cold power of death;
But that such tribute duly given
Lifts the weak mourner's thoughts to heaven, 2960

And round the venerated tomb
Bids infant virtues rise and bloom.
Well may the serfs with toil and care
The monumental pile uprear,
Gigantic mound, which there shall raise 2965

Its structure to Earth's latest days,

A huge memorial ! not to tell
How bled the brave, how beauty fell ;
But that, as cold Oblivion's hand
Blots their frail glories from the land, 2970
The great, the fair, whate'er their lot,
Sleep undistinguish'd and forgot.
The mound, the massive stones remain
To frown on the surrounding plain ;
The peasant oft shall check the plough
To gaze upon its lofty brow,
To think of wars and beacon fires,
Strange tales transmitted by his sires ;
But none shall live, in sooth to tell
Who sleeps within that gloomy cell. 2980-

THE END.



N O T E S.



NOTES TO CANTO I.

"With pomp he held the feast of Yule."

Line 5.

YULE or iöl, was the principal festival amongst the northern nations, and was held at Christmas.

"Where ancient Sigtune's turrets famed

"Frown'd proudly, from old Odin named."

Line 9.

Sigtun was an ancient town which stood nearly in the

situation of Stockholm. It is said to have been founded by Odin, who was also called Sige, which indeed was perhaps his real name, while that of Odin may have been assumed when he first attempted to usurp the character of a Deity, and to persuade the people of the north that he was the very god whom they had been accustomed to worship.

"Twelve champions huge stalk'd proudly in."

Line 53.

The champions of the north were called Berserker in the old tongue, from *ber*, bare, and *serkr*, a garment; because they wore no armour in battle. I have given some account of them in the notes to the song of Thrym, in my volume of Icelandic translations. They are described by almost all the northern writers as men of extraordinary stature and force, subject to sudden and violent attacks of passion, under the influence of which their fury was ungovernable, and as for-

midable to their natural friends as to their enemies. At such times their bodily strength was almost supernatural, and they would vent their rage even upon inanimate objects, till they sunk down sick and weak with exhaustion after the most prodigious exertions. They were supposed by the first christians in the north to be possessed by devils, and baptism was esteemed to be a cure for this species of ferocious madness. Certain it is, that after the introduction of christianity the manners of the north began to assume a milder character, and the same tone of mind which could incline a heathen warrior to receive baptism, would at the same time enable him to repress such ungovernable paroxysms of temper.

"Each wore a wolf's dark brindled skin."

Line 54.

The aboriginal inhabitants of the north, before the irrup-

tion of Odin and his followers from the banks of the Tanais, appear to have clothed themselves with the skins of wolves, and they are frequently mentioned with abhorrence in the ancient writings under the name of Ulfhedner, as persons of very wolfish habits and disposition as well as appearance. Thus, in the old poet Hornklof, we read,

Einjado Ulfhedner, oc isarn glumdo,

i. e. The wolfish men howled, and the iron resounded.

The wolf's skin appears to have been looked upon as a badge of ferocity.

"Kiölen."

Line 80.

A high mountainous ridge so called.

"To the high dais with speed he pass'd."

Line 101.

The dais was the upper part of the hall where the high table was placed, and it was more elevated than the rest of the room. It was called in the old tongue Aundveige.

"And mead pour'd by the blooming maid."

Line 121.

It seems to have been the universal custom of the north for the daughters of princes and illustrious men to pour out the liquor, and hand the goblet round to all the warriors, who partook of the hospitality of their fathers. In heaven this was supposed to be one of the principal functions of the Valkyriur, or maids of slaughter, who returned every evening from the fields of warfare to administer the beverage of the gods to the souls of heroes; and therefore, with reference to the superstitions of their religious creed, it was looked upon as the natural and honorable employment of distinguished young females. It is mentioned in Volsunga Saga, as a par-

ticular mark of the masculine mind and disposition of the warlike Brynhilda, that she would never pour out beer or mead for any person in the hall of her father.

"Sail'd I from Ledra's stately port."

Line 144.

Ledra, called in the old tongue Hledru, in Danish Leire, and by the Latin historians and commentators Lethra, was the ancient royal residence in Zeeland before the foundation of Copenhagen. It was situated on a river that flowed into the great inlet of sea called Issefiord. In consequence of the navigation having been obstructed by increasing sand-banks, the royal residence, which was not established at Copenhagen till the middle of the fifteenth century, was removed in the first instance to Roeskilde, a place at no great distance from Ledra, which was so called from a spring of water which had been used by the old Danish king Roe, who

reigned at the beginning of the sixth century. Saxo Grammaticus states erroneously, that Ledra was built by Rolf Krake, the successor of Roe, who was however the twenty-third king that reigned in Ledra. It was founded a few years before the birth of Christ by Skiodl, the son of Odin, and was the seat of a long line of Danish kings, from that time until the ninth or the tenth century. King Harald Hildetand was buried there in the eighth century, and a mound is still pointed out as his grave. The name of Ledra is supposed to be derived from *Leir*, in English *lair*, meaning an abode or safe place, and probably the royal residence, in the days of king Skiodl, was not very preferable to the lair of a wild beast. Rolf Krake embellished and made considerable additions to Ledra, on which account Saxo Grammaticus has called him its founder. The exact time when the royal residence was removed from Ledra to Roeskilde is not accurately known, but it was probably about the time of

the introduction of christianity. Harald Blaatand, the first christian monarch in Denmark, built a wooden church at Roeskilde, and was buried there in the tenth century, and soon after, in the reign of Canute the Great, it became a place of more considerable importance : but Ledra was still a place of strength in the reign of Valdemar the first, in the twelfth century. Nothing now remains of the ancient capital of Denmark, but the vestiges which the eye of an antiquarian may still discover on the surface of the soil. The river on which the fleet of Denmark used to ride in safety has long been dried up and choked; and the name of Ledra can only be traced in a few miserable cottages within a mile of Roeskilde, and in the splendid mansion of an individual. Lethreborg, the house of count Holstein, stands near the site of the once famous Ledra, and is celebrated for the beauty of its modern gardens. An engraving of it is given in the *Atlas of Pontoppidan*.

"At solemn feast all Denmark heard

"My high-sworn oath and plighted word."

Line 150.

It was usual amongst the old northern warriors, for one who was about to undertake an arduous enterprise, at some festival, in the presence of the whole court, to lift up high the cup that was presented to him, and make a solemn vow, from the performance of which no considerations would afterwards deter him. This was called *at strenga heit, to vow high*, and nothing could release a warrior from the obligation which he had thus solemnly taken upon himself. After this manner Brynhilda made a solemn vow to marry no man who had ever been afraid; and Harald Haarfager, the founder of the Norwegian monarchy, never to cut or comb his hair till he should have reduced all the provinces of Norway under his dominion.

"Samsöe the field; this maid our right."

Line 249.

Samsöe is an island in the Baltic, called by Latin writers Samos Baltica. It was a singular custom amongst the northern nations to fight their duels on the islands which abound upon their coasts, and on this account a duel was called Holm-gangr, i. e. *an island-meeting*. Perhaps this practice was adopted with an idea of fighting upon neutral ground, and in a place where no persons would interfere. The challenge thus given to fight in Samsöe is an historical fact.

"Sworn brothers in the fight, they dared

"Each foe, and every peril shared."

Line 354.

Nothing could exceed the romantic attachment of those northern warriors, who had associated themselves by a so-

lemn compact of friendship, which was sanctified by the superstitious ceremony of drawing blood from their bodies, and mingling it in token of their inviolable union. "Icturi "fœdus veteres," says *Saxo Grammaticus*, "vestigia sua "mutui sanguinis aspersione perfundere consueverant, ami- "ciarum pignus alterni cruaris commercio firmaturi." They were called *Stallbrodre*. It was not unusual upon those occasions to pledge themselves mutually not to survive each other, and the obligation of suicide which had been so contracted was invariably fulfilled. A singular circumstance of this nature is said to have happened in the reign of *Frode the Third*. *Asuit* and *Asmund*, two warriors of distinction, had bound themselves by such an engagement. *Asuit* died of an accidental illness, and his body, together with those of his horse and dog, were let down by a rope into a deep cavern; and *Asmund*, who had sworn not to live after him, descended also into the abyss with a considerable store of provisions. A long time after, *Eric*, the son of *Regner*, pass-

ing with his army, determined to ransack the tomb of Asuit in search of the treasures which were supposed to be concealed in it, and a strong young man was let down into the cave in a basket suspended by a rope. Asmund, who was still living, easily overpowered the man, who was terrified at his appearance, and jumping into the basket, was drawn up from the bottom of the dungeon, and the men of Eric, seeing his long hair and nails and squalid appearance, and thinking that he was the spirit of the dead whose tomb they were violating, fled with the utmost horror and consternation. Asmund probably considered himself to be released from the obligation of his vow by this unexpected resurrection, especially as he had left a substitute in the cavern.

NOTES TO CANTO II.

*"Hard by the eastern gate of hell,
In ancient time great Vala fell."*

Line 462.

VALA or Volva, *a prophetess*; in the genitive singular, Vaulu or Völu, and in the nominative plural Vaulur. In Hyndlu-liod it is said that all the Vaulur were the children of Vidolfi.

Eru Vaulur allar frá Vidolfi.

There is in the unpublished Edda a curious ancient mythological poem, called Völospá hin skemre, or the ancient prophecy of Vala, from which several stanzas are quoted in Bartolinus. The whole may be found in manuscript in the British Museum. The beginning of Völospá is particularly poetical :

Hliodz bidium allar helgar kindur,
Meirre oc minne, maugu Heimdallar!
Vil ec Valfaudur vel umtelia,
Fornspiöll fyra tha ec fyrst ofnam !

i. e. I bid silence to all the holy beings, greater and smaller, children of the God of light ! I will tell of the weal of the father of the slain (Odin), ancient prophesies which I first learnt !

The Vaulur, or prophetic spirits, are often mentioned in the

plural, but there appears to have been one principal Vala, who is supposed to speak in Völospá, and whom Odin descended into hell to consult in her tomb concerning the fate of Balder.

Thá ræid Yggr fyrí austan dyrr,

Thar ær han vissi Völu læidi.

i. e. Then rode Odin before the eastern door,
Where he knew Vala's tomb.

The English reader has long been acquainted with this passage in the northern mythology, through the means of Gray's beautiful translation of one of the most interesting relics of Scandinavian poetry, Vegtam's Quida, the song of the Traveller, or the descent of Odin. The descent into the lower regions, for the purpose of consulting the tomb of Vala, offered me some imagery, which I was unwilling to forego;

and the few verses concerning the whelp of Hela are imitated from the fine lines in Vegtam's Quida.

Ræid han nidr thadan Niftheliaр til ;
 Mætti han hvælpi theim ær or Hæliu kom.
 Seá var blodugr um briost framan,
 Kiapt vigfrekan ok kialka nedan :
 Gó han a moti ok gein storum
 Galldr's födr ; gol um lsengi.
 Framm reid Odinn, folldvægr dundi ;
 Han kom at hafa Hæliar ranni,
 Thar ær han vissi Völu læidi.

i. e. He rode down thence to the lowest abyss of hell ;
 He met the whelp which came out from hell.
 He was bloody on his breast before,
 His chops eager for strife, and his nether jaw ;
 He bayed against (and opened his mouth wide)

The father of the spell ; he howled long after.

On rode Odin, the foundation of the earth shook ;

He rode to the lofty abode of Hela,

Where he knew was the tomb of Vala.

I am aware that, after Gray's beautiful translation, it was rather dangerous to meddle with this passage ; but the dog of the infernal regions could not have been properly passed over in silence, and I trust that I have sufficiently diversified the expression.

"*To gloomy Hela's dire abode.*"

Line 578.

Hela was the goddess of hell. She is said to have appeared in a vision to Balder on the eve of his death, to inform him that he would have the satisfaction of sleeping with her the next night.

"The lofty gates of hell were seen."

Lines 679. —

Hafa Hæljær ranni, the lofty abode of Hela. *Vegtams Quida.* The words "Portals nine of Hell," which Gray has inserted in the descent of Odin, and the note saying that the hell of the gothic nations consisted of nine worlds, are erroneous. They reckoned that there were nine worlds or heavens, and that hell was below them.

"Deep-bosom'd in the northern fells,

"A pigmy race immortal dwells."

Line 714.

The inhabitants of the north believed that the rocky regions were inhabited by dwarfs, who had secret forges in the caverns, and were most skilful artificers of all sorts of weapons, which by the force of magic they could endow with the most extraordinary powers. A long list of their names

is given in Völspa. They were called in the old tongue Dvergar.—In almost all countries the superstition of the ruder natives has peopled the stone quarries, and caverns, and rocky solitudes, with supernatural inhabitants ; and indeed it seems natural to have imagined, that those places which could afford shelter, and were yet from their desolation unfit for the abode of men, might be occupied by malicious spirits. I recollect having somewhere met with a tradition, that the Emperor Maximilian the First had been decoyed by an evil spirit amongst the rocks in the neighbourhood of Innspruck, though I forget from whence I derived the story. Maximilian goes out from Innspruck to the chase with a splendid retinue, and is led by the pursuit into the rocky mountains. A holy man meets them, and warns the Emperor to beware of the mountain spirits. He is scoffed at by the Emperor ; but urges his admonitions, assuring him that nothing but the vigilance of the good spirits (who also dwell there, but assist only the faithful) can save those who en-

tangle themselves amongst the haunted precipices. The Emperor pursues the chase, and at the foot of a stupendous rock he starts a beautiful chamois, at which he fires, but misses his aim, which he had not done for ten years before. He pursues the chamois, which frequently stops and looks at him. He fires at it repeatedly, but in vain. At evening the beast suddenly vanishes, and the Emperor finds himself alone and lost amongst the cavities of the rocks. He wanders two days there, living with difficulty upon wild berries. On the second night he bethinks himself of praying to the Holy Virgin for her protection, after which he falls into a sweet sleep, and in the morning is awakened by a beautiful youth dressed like a peasant, who brings him fruit and milk, and offers to conduct him out of the mountains. Maximilian joyfully follows him, till he arrives at the foot of the same stupendous rock where he had first seen the chamois; and there his conductor vanishes, and he immediately hears the horn of his huntsman.

**I believe that such superstitions are common to almost all
rocky countries.**

NOTES TO CANTO III.

"That love, for which thou fain wouldest die,

"Shall in thy breast forgotten lie."

Lines 854 and 855.

IT was common among the northern nations to imagine that the recollection of love could for a time be entirely suspended by the force of incantations. This effect is said to have been frequently produced by Runic charms, that is, by incantations wrought by the means of letters, or by administering a love potion, which produced a transfer of affection and a total oblivion of the former attachment.

In the history of Brynhilda, it is said that in consequence of her having offended Odin, he touched her with a wand which produced a supernatural slumber and oblivion. In the Appendix I have subjoined a short poem founded upon her history.

"Some skill'd to bend the Upland bow."

Line 874.

Thar alma Uplendingar bendu: where the Uplanders bend
the bow. *Knytlinga Saga.*

"Some with long snow-shoes skating fast."

Line 900.

An engraving is given by Stephanus, in his notes on Saxo Grammaticus, of a pair of the snow-shoes used by the ancient Swedes and Norwegians, which he says that

he preserved in his Museum. They were three yards long, pointed and turned up at both ends, but not much wider than the foot, to which they were fixed in the middle by strong thongs. They were made of wood, covered underneath with seal-skin. With the assistance of such shoes the natives traversed the snow with great rapidity. They are thus described by Olaus Magnus : “*Skydi sive Ondrur asseres sunt oblongi, et antrorsum sublevati, quinque vel ad summam sex ulnarum longitudine, latitudine verò transversam plantam non excedentes. His etiamnum pedibus inductis nostrates per superficiem profundissimam nivium et infirmæ glaciei, si aliàs corporis humani pondus non sustineat, ingrediuntur.*” Usi etiam veteres Norvagi in terrâ planâ et nudâ ejusmodi Xylosoleis, subjectis rotulis, et sic plus itinéris una die, quam, absque illis, tribus confici potuit ; habitusque est hic modus proficisci inter præcipuas agilitatis artes.

In the song of Harald the Hardy, amongst the arts

which he has acquired, he boasts that he can glide dexterously on snow-shoes.

"And sail for that dark Samian shore."

Line 1075.

Samsöe, called by Latin writers the Baltic Samos.

NOTES TO CANTO IV.

"His food the berries hid below."

Line 1160.

A BERRY, which I believe is either the fruit of the *Arbutus thymifolia*, or of the *Arbutus uva ursi*, is found in perfection under the snow in Norway towards the approach of spring, and is much sought by the reindeer.

"In the deep bosom of the dell,

"Might yet of ancient ruin tell."

Lines 1196 and 1197.

Since Helga was sent to the press, I have seen my friend Mr. Walter Scott's *Lord of the Isles*, which has been lately published; and I have observed some similarity of expression in his description of the wild rocks in the isle of Skye, which is entirely accidental. The description of the rocky scenery in the fourth Canto of Helga, was written five years ago, and not a single word has been altered in it since that time.

"Thy lofty song, the warrior's code."

Line 1285.

A very old Scandinavian poem, called *Havamál*, or the High Song of Odin. It forms a part of the unprinted Edda, of which there is a manuscript in the British Museum. It is supposed to be spoken by Odin, and many persons have believed that it was actually written by him. It begins in this manner:

1.

Before thou goest forth, thou shalt look round every way;
Thou shalt examine:
For no man should be careless, while his foes
Lie in ambush for him.

2.

Hail to those who give! A guest is come in!
Where shall he find a seat?
Greatly he hastens, who wishes by the fire
To recruit his strength again.

And further on it proceeds thus:

Silent and highminded shall a king's son
And valiant be:
Gracious and gentle shall an honorable man
Continue until his death.

An unwise man thinks to live for ever,
If he keeps himself from warfare :
But old age to him grants not peace,
Although the spear may spare him.

And in a later part :

In the blast shall man fell trees ;

In a calm on ocean row ;

In the darkness talk with maids,

Many are the eyes of day.

With boats are fish taken ; shields are for defence ;

Swords to strike with, maids to kiss.

Fair shall he speak, and fair shall he give,

Who seeks a maiden's love to gain ;

Praise the beautiful girl's white form ;

Rich in words is he who woos.

No one shall grant love to another,
For beauty's sake alone.
Oft on fools is seen that which the wise lack,
A lovely delicate complexion.

I found a pure maid on her bed reclining,
Bright as the beaming sun.
And nothing better then seem'd to me
Than to dwell near such a form.

Late in the evening shalt thou come in,
If thou wilt speak with a maiden ;
It is evil and unlucky if more than two know
What ye have together.

I went forth and thought
That I had all her consent ;
I truly believed that I entirely possessed
All her taste and fondness.

I came again, and immediately all
As if prepared for strife were awakened :
With shining torches and burning lights
My wild way was beset.

And in the morning when I came in
There lay all asleep ;
I found there a hound instead of a beautiful maid
Tucked up in the bed.

This curious poem, which consists of a great many stanzas, is certainly of great antiquity ; but it may perhaps have been attributed to Odin himself, merely because the words are supposed to be spoken by him.

"Art thou, he cried, the thundering Thor."

Line 1364.

Thor is frequently called the thunderer. There is a cu-

rious figure of Thor engraved in Stephanus's *Saxo Grammaticus*, in which he is represented sitting with a long beard, holding in one hand a sceptre, and in the other a thunder-bolt, and having a large circle of stars round his head. His long beard is mentioned in the old poem of the recovery of Hammer.

"A thousand Elves of swarthy hue."

Line 1462.

There were two descriptions of Elves or Alfar in the northern mythology : the radiant Elves, who were secondary divinities, and dwelt upon the earth, in Alfheim ; and the dark Elves, who dwelt under ground.

NOTES TO CANTO V.

"Midst cavern'd rocks the giant Gete."

Line 1759.

I HAVE used the name of Gete for the aboriginal inhabitants of the North before the irruption of Odin and his followers. They were men of larger stature than the Asiatic tribes which accompanied him, and were called Jotner and Jæter. Without entering into the question whether the Getæ were of the same race with the northern Jotuns or Jæts, the similarity of the name appears to warrant its application.

"In soft Sicilia's southern air."

Line 1787.

The inhabitants of the North had much communication with the South of Europe. Gardarike, or Garda kingdom, was a part of Russia which is very frequently mentioned in the northern writings. Austurvega is the old Scandinavian name for another portion of Russia. It appears that Odin, and his successors kept up a communication with the Asi, from whom they were descended, on the banks of the Tanais. Harald the hardy, who was king of Norway at a later period, after dwelling some time at the court of Jarisleif, king of Gardarike, proceeded to Constantinople, where he served with reputation in the imperial army, and carried his victorious arms into Sicily. But at a much earlier period the northern nations had much intercourse with Italy. Gu-druna, the beautiful widow of Sigurd Sigmundson, who is so celebrated in the ancient northern writings and was murdered at the instigation of Brynhilda, was afterwards mar-

ried to Attila, king of the Huns; and Thidrek or Theodoric, duke of Verona or Bern, Rodingeir, margrave of Bakalar, probably Basle, on the Rhine, and Rodegeir, earl of Salernum, are very much celebrated in Niflunga Saga, which relates the history of Sigurd and Brynhilda, the subsequent marriage of Gudruna with Attila, and the slaughter of her brothers who were killed by her perfidy at the court of Attila to gratify her revenge for the part they had borne in the murder of Sigurd. In Niflunga Saga, she is, however, called Grimhilda, which was the name of her mother, as may be seen in Yolsunga Saga, and the unpublished Edda.

"The weeping Elves shall strew her grave."

Line 1989.

The word Elf has been generally applied in the English language to malicious spirits; but the Elves or Alfar of the North were of two sorts, the dark Elves, who dwelt under

ground, and the Lios-alfar, or radiant Elves, who were benevolent beings, and looked upon as secondary divinities, in amity with Odin and his followers.

NOTES TO CANTO VI.

“ *The soaring snipe salutes the spring,*

“ *While the breeze whistles through his wing.*”

Lines 2077 and 2078.

THE note of the snipe in the spring, when the breeding season approaches, is very different from his call in other seasons of the year. As soon as the mild weather of spring appears, he begins to rise high on the wing, crying, *peet, peet, peet,* and continues to sport in the air for many hours at a time, letting himself fall obliquely, or dive through the air.

from a great height as if he were about to alight ; but suddenly stops his descent and rises again to the same elevation. During the descent he makes no motion of the pinions, but by a singular contraction of the muscles, each individual quill of the wing is turned sideways, so as to meet the air and obstruct his descent, and the wind whistles in a most remarkable manner through the feathers, making a noise like the prolonged repetition of the letters *dr*. This noise has been called the snipe's drumming, with reference to the letters *dr*, though the noise has not the least resemblance to that of a drum,

" O'er the rude rocks of Agnafit."

Line 2163.

The present site of Stockholm.

" Six Maids in complete armour dight."

Line 2173.

Thirteen of the Valkyriur or Maids of slaughter are enumerated in Grimnismál; but others are named in the Edda and in Haconarmál. I have never seen their exact number stated. In Volospá only six are named, and those appear to have been the most distinguished.

Sa hun Valkyriur vytt um komnar,
Giörvar at ryda til Godthiödar;
Skuld hielt Skyldi, enn Skögil onnur,
Gunnr, Hildr, Gondul, or Geirskogul.
Nu ero taldar nönnor Herians,
Giörvar at ryda grund Valkyriur.

i. e. "She saw the Valkyriur come from afar,
Appointed to ride to the chosen people of Odín:
Skuld held her shield, and Skogul second,
Gunnr, Hildr, Gondul, and Geirskogul;
Now are enumerated the maids of the God of war,
The Valkyriur appointed to ride over the field of battle."

It was their province to chuse out those who were to fall in battle, to bear the invitation of Odin to the most distinguished, and to pour out the beverage of the gods, ale or mead, for the souls of the heroes in Valhall.

“*Gondula's immortal spear.*”

Line 2246.

Gondul was one of the Valkyriur. She is mentioned in Haconarmál, where she warns king Haco of his approaching death. Valkyriur or Valkyrior is the plural. Valkyrie is the singular, derived from Valr, the slain, and ec kiöri, I chuse or select.

“*And in bright fields of azure light,*

“*Each day renew the blissful fight.*”

Lines 2281 and 2282.

The occupation of the souls of heroes in the hall of Odin is set forth in the old poem Vafthrudnismál.

Allir einheriar
Odins tunom
Hauggvas hveriann dag ;
Val their kiðsa,
Oc rída vígi frá ;
Aul med A'som drecka,
Oc sediaz Særhimni ;
Sitia meirr um sáttir saman.

i. e. "All the heroes at the court of Odin fight every day. They chuse the slain, and ride from the battle ; drink ale with the gods, and eat the flesh of the boar. They sit most amicably together." In the Edda, it is said, that every morning as soon as they are apparelled, they go out into the court and fight with each other till the close of the day, when they return to Valhall to drink beer or mead.

"*Flaps his strong wings with fierce delight.*"

Line 2342.

The delight which an eagle shews in a storm of wind and rain is very remarkable, even when it is chained to a perch.

*"Portentous weapon which of yore
His sire from Odin's offspring tore."*

Lines 2397 and 2398.

Angrim was the father of Angantyr. He killed in single combat Svaflumlami, the grandson of Odin, and took from him his famous sword Tirfing, which had been made by the dwarfs; and he carried off his daughter Eyfur or Eyyvora, who became the mother of Angantyr and his brothers. The particulars are related in Hervarar Saga.

*"His bow is bent, and from the string
Behold the unerring arrow spring."*

Lines 2431 and 2432.

The name Orvarodd signifies the point of an arrow, which

suggested the probability of his making use of that weapon in the combat. In Hervarar Saga, he is said to have killed all the brothers of Angantyr successively, but not with the bow and arrow.

“ *By whom two coal black ravens sit,*
“ *Memory and Observation hight.*”

Lines 2564 and 2565.

Huginn ok Muninn.—Observation and Memory.—They are mentioned in the twentieth stanza of Grimnismal, as flying every day round the world.

Huginn ok Muninn

Fliuga hverian dag

Iörmun grund yfir.

Oumc ec of Huginn,

At han aprt ne comith,

Thó siámc meirr um Muninn.

i. e. "Observation and Memory fly every day over the ground of the earth. I fear, concerning Observation, that he may not come back, but I look round more anxiously for Memory."

In the prose Edda they are described as ravens. Hrafnar sitia tveir a auxlum hans, ok segia honum oll tidindi i eyro hans thau er their sia ethr heyra. Their heita sva, Hugin oc Munin. Tha sendir Odin i daga at fiuga um heima alla ok koma aprt um dagverth. Thvi heitr han Hrafna Gud.

i. e. "Two ravens sit on his shoulders and tell in his ear all the tidings of what they see or hear. They are called thus, Hugin and Munin. Odin sends them every day to fly round the whole universe, and return at the decline of day. Hence he has been called the god of the ravens."

"There sits Heimdallar, god of light."

Line 2576.

Heimdallar, the god of light, is stated in the Edda to have the gift of hearing even the grass grow in the fields, and the wool on the flocks. By the nine sister virgins, who are said to have given him birth, are probably meant the nine heavens from which light proceeds. In the old poem Vafthrudnismál, Vafthrudnir says, that he has visited all the upper worlds, and that they are nine in number.

Frá Jotna runom
Oc allra Goda
Ec kann segia satt;
Thviat hvern hefi ec
Heim um komit:
Nið kom ec heima
Fyr Nifhel nedan;
Hinig deyia or Helio halir.

i. e. "I can speak truly of the incantations of the Jotuns and all the Gods; because I have travelled round every world. I have visited nine worlds above the abyss of hell. There men die by the power of Hela."

And in Völospa hin skemre, the prophetess says :

Nyo nam ec heima, nyo i vide,
Miötvid mæran syr molld nedan.

i. e. "I have found nine worlds, and nine beams (or poles) in them. The largest pole through the earth beneath."

He is called in Grimnismál Vörða Godom, the wardour of the gods. He is possessed of a horn, called Giällarhorn, which may be heard throughout the whole universe. This is the trumpet which will be heard at the end of the world, to apprise the gods of the approach of their enemies and the destruction which will envelope them.

"And there Iduna, queen of youth."

Line 2590.

Kona Braga heitr Idun. Hon vardveitr i eski sino epli
thaу er Gudin skulo a bita tha er thau elldaz. Ok verda
tha allir ungir, ok sva mun verda til Ragnaraucks.

i. e. "The wife of Braga is called Idun. She preserves
in her box those apples which the gods bite when they grow
old, and they all become young again : and so it must be till
the end of the world."

"Braga, by bards adored."

Line 2600.

Braga was the god of poetry,

"All glorious Tyr in battle crown'd."

Line 2602.

Tyr was the god of victory.

"And Thor, for courage high renown'd."

Line 2603.

Thor was the son of Jord, the earth. He is celebrated for his military prowess and his voracity. He was held in great veneration as one of the most powerful deities, and he is supposed to have been considered by some of the northern tribes as superior even to Odin. His hammer, which was shaped like a cross, was the symbol used to summon the chiefs to council, and the dependants to arms; and after the introduction of christianity the same cross continued to be used for that purpose.

"There sits Niorder, at whose voice

"The unfetter'd waves and winds rejoice."

Lines 2604 and 2605.

Niorder was of the nation of the Vanir, a Grecian colony, who are always called in the old northern writings the wise

Vanir. He is said to have been educated in Vanaheim, and to have been given up by the Vanir to the Gods or Goths in exchange for one of their number, as a hostage on the re-establishment of peace between them.

I Vanaheimi

Scopo hanò vís Regin,
Oc seldu at gislingo Godum ;
I aldar rauc.
Hann mun aptr coma
Heim med vísom Vaunom,

i. e. "In Vanaheim, the wise deities created him, and gave him as a hostage to the gods. At the end of ages he must return home to the wise Vanir."—*Vafthurdnismal*, 39.

The Edda says that he rules over the motion of the winds, can tranquillize the sea, winds, and fire; and that he is to be invoked by all seafaring men and hunters. He ap-

pears to have made a very uncomfortable marriage in Norway, where he espoused a mountain nymph, called Skada, the daughter of the giant Thiassa, at Drontheim. Niorder dwelt at Noatun by the sea side; but Skada was an expert and active huntress, and could not be prevailed upon to dwell with her husband on the sea-coast; and it was at last agreed between them, that they should pass nine nights in the mountains of Drontheim, and three by the sea-side at Noatun. The dissatisfaction of both parties is whimsically expressed in the Edda, where Niorder, on his return after passing nine disagreeable nights in the mountains, says:

Heid erumz fioll :

Varkada ek længi

Hia nætr einar nio.

Ulfa thytr,

Er af vidi kemr

Morgin hvern mer.

"The mountains are hateful, I have been sleepless
these nine long nights. The wolves howl that come to me
from the wood every morning."

To this Skada answers,

Safa ek maki
Sœvar bedium,
A fugls jarmi fyrir,
Sa mik vekr ;
Mer thotti illr vera
Hia saungvi svana.

"Can I sleep easy on the bed of the seagod, amidst the
wail of the sea-fowl that wakes me? To me it seems dis-
agreeable to be near the song of the swans."

Niorder had two children, Freyr, the god of peace and

plenty, and Freya, the goddess of beauty, by a former wife, while he dwelt amongst the Vanir.

"Freya, from whom flows every bliss."

Line 2611.

Freya was the goddess of beauty, and has been generally called the northern Venus. She wears a necklace of the most brilliant stones, which is frequently mentioned as her peculiar ornament. The goddess of love in the northern mythology is properly Siofna, who is in fact a female Cupid: but she is not often mentioned, nor with any particular attributes or description.

"There silent Vidar, whose delight

"Is the still gloom of peaceful night."

Lines 2619 and 2620,

Vidar is the god of silence and retirement. It is said in the Edda, that he affords great consolation to the gods in all difficulties and dangers. At the end of the world, after the destruction of Odin and the other gods, Vidar, the god of silence, and Vali, the god of strength, will alone survive. Vidar is said in Grimmismál to dwell in a bower covered with willows and high grass.

Hrisi vex
Oc há grasi
Vidars land vidi;
Enn thar maugr af læzc
Af mars baki
Fröcn ok hefna faudor.

i. e. "The habitation of Vidar grows with twigs, high grass, and willows. Yet from thence shall the youth spring from the mare's back valiant, and revenge his father."

"There wise Forseti, judge of right."

Line 2027.

The Edda says, Forseti was the son of Balder, and Nauna Nef's daughter, "All who come before him with disputes, depart reconciled ; he is the best judge amongst gods and men."

In Grimnismál, stanza 15.

Glitnir er inn tiundi ;
 Han er gulli studdr,
 Ok silfri thaetr id sama.
 Enn thar Forseti byggir
 Flestan dag,
 Ok svæfer allar sakir.

i. e. "Glitnir is the tenth dwelling of the gods. It is propt with gold, and the same is covered with silver. And there Forseti dwells most days, and puts to rest all disputes."

*"And he, whose wonderous infant might
Slew hateful Hauder left of sight."*

Lines 2628 and 2629.

Vali the god of strength, son of Odin and Kinda. Hauder the blind god had slain Balder. Vali, on the very night of his birth, revenged the death of Balder, by killing Hauder. This wonderful feat, which has some analogy to the fable of Hercules strangling the serpents in his cradle, is foretold by the prophetess in the descent of Odin, which has been translated by Gray. Rinda came from the east of Russia. The lines,

"In the caverns of the west,

"A wonderous son shall Rinda bear,"

in Gray's translation, mean that she had come from the east to dwell with Odin in the more western parts of Europe. In the original, the lines are :

Rindr berr son

I Væstr sölum;

Sá man Odins son

Æin-nættr vega.

i. e. "In the western halls, Rinda shall bear a son. He shall kill Odin's son (Hauder) when only one night old."

The same account is given in Volospá.

I have called Rinda the daughter of the Sun on the authority of a passage in Vafthrudnismál,

Eina dóttur berr Alfrödull,

i. e. "The Sun shall bear one daughter," and of another passage in Hrafna-galldr Odins, where the sun, is called Rindar módur, the mother of Rinda, as well as Alfraudul. It is remarkable that in the northern mythology the sun is a female, and the moon a male deity.

"*And he, at heaven's extremest verge,*

"*Who broods o'er ocean's swelling surge.*"

Lines 2637 and 2638.

His name was Hræsvelger. He is thus described in the thirty-seventh stanza of Vafthrudnismál.

Hræsvelger heiter,
Er sitr á himins enda,
Jotun i arnar ham ;
Af hans vengiom
Qveda vind koma
Alla menn yfir.

i.e. "He is called Hraesvelger, who sits at the extremity of the heavens, a giant in the clothing of an eagle. From his wings it is said that the winds proceed over all mankind."

"*And that dark power, whose ample shield
Before the sun's bright face is held.*"

Lines 2641 and 2642.

There is an account of this shield in the thirty-eighth stanza of Grimmismál.

Svalin heitir, han stendr
Solo fyri,
Sciöldr scinanda gudi.
Biörg ok brim ec veit
At brenna scolo,
Ef han fellr i frá.

i. e. "Svalin is his name, he stands a shield before the sun, the shining deity. I know that the hills and the sea would burn, if it were to fall from its place."

"Nor these alone, but all who boast
"Of might in heaven's ambrosial host."

Lines 2645 and 2646.

There are many other divinities enumerated in the

northern mythology. Uller, the son of Sifia, who is said to have introduced the use of fire, and Frigga the wife of Odin, who is called the first of the goddesses. Saga is mentioned in the Edda as the second goddess; but her attributes are not mentioned. In Grimnismál it is said, that her habitation is amongst waterfalls, and that she and Odin drink together out of golden vessels. Gefion was attended upon by females, who died in their virginity. Fulla, with long flowing hair and a gold band round her forehead, was the handmaid of Frigga. Vara presided over oaths, Lofen over friendships, Syn over closed doors and refusals, Hlin over childbirth. There were many others of less importance. I have only mentioned in the poem those whose attributes appeared to furnish the most poetical images.

*"The radiant maids, whom oft the Lord
 Of war sends forth with lance and sword,
There pour the mead and deck the board."*

Lines 2649—2651.

The Valkyriur are mentioned in *Grimnismál* as bearing the horn in their hands, and offering the liquor to the heroes in Valhalla. The description of the hall of Odin is taken from *Grimnismál*.

Gladsheimir heitir enn fimti,

Thars hin gullbiarta

Valhaull víd of thrymir.

ENN than Hropr kyss

Hverian dag

Vapn-dauda vera.

Mjöc er audkent

Theim er til Odins koma

Sal-kynni at sia.

Skauptom er rann rept,

Scioldom er salr thakidr,

Bryniom um becki strád.

i. e. "Gladsheimr is the name of the fifth habitation. There bright with gold the wide Valhall (or hall of the slain) is firmly fixed; and there Odin chuses each day the men slain by weapons. It is easily distinguished by those who come to see the palace inhabited by Odin. The building is roofed with shafts of spears, the hall is covered (or *thatched*) with shields. Coats of mail are spread on the benches."

"*Till round the flames of Surtur roll,*
" *And the gold horn shall wake the gods*
" *To war, from all their blest abodes.*"

Lines 2659—2661.

According to the northern mythology, the destruction of the world will be preceded by three winters of intense severity, without the intervention of any summer, the sun having lost its power; after which Surtur riding at the head of the sons of Muspell, will attack the gods (Muspellheim

being, as it seems, the region or abode of fire, from whence it is said in the Edda, that the gods obtained the chariot of the sun), fire will blaze before and after the footsteps of Surtur, and his sword will glitter like the sun. Heimdaller will blow a loud blast with his horn to alarm the gods, who will go forth to the combat accompanied by all the souls of heroes. The gods, after slaying many of their opponents, will fall in the contest: after which Surtur will destroy the whole universe by fire.—Vidar will avenge the death of Odin, and after the destruction of the world by fire, Vidar and Vali, the powers of silence and strength, will alone survive: and Majesty and Might, the sons of Thor (that is, of Fortitude) will put an end to the confusion.

Vidar oc Vali

Byggia ve goda,

Thá er slocnar Surta logi.

Modi oc Magni

Scolo Miöllni hafa,

Ok vinna at vigthroti.

i. e. "Silence and Strength shall inhabit the mansions of the gods, after the fire of Surtur shall have been extinguished. Majesty and Might will obtain the hammer of Thör, and put an end to the warfare by perseverance." — *Vafthrudnismál*, 51.

NOTE TO CANTO VII.

*"His limbs, embalm'd with precious care,
Slow to the ship his vassals bear."*

Lines 2774 and 2775.

THE history of the combat of Hialmar and Orvarodd with Angantyr, and his eleven brothers, is related in Hervarar Saga and Orvarodds Saga, but with some variation. I have never been able to procure a copy of Orvarodds Saga, and am only acquainted with its contents through the medium of Danish writers, and especially a free translation, or at least a tale founded upon it, in the works of professor Suhm. I have

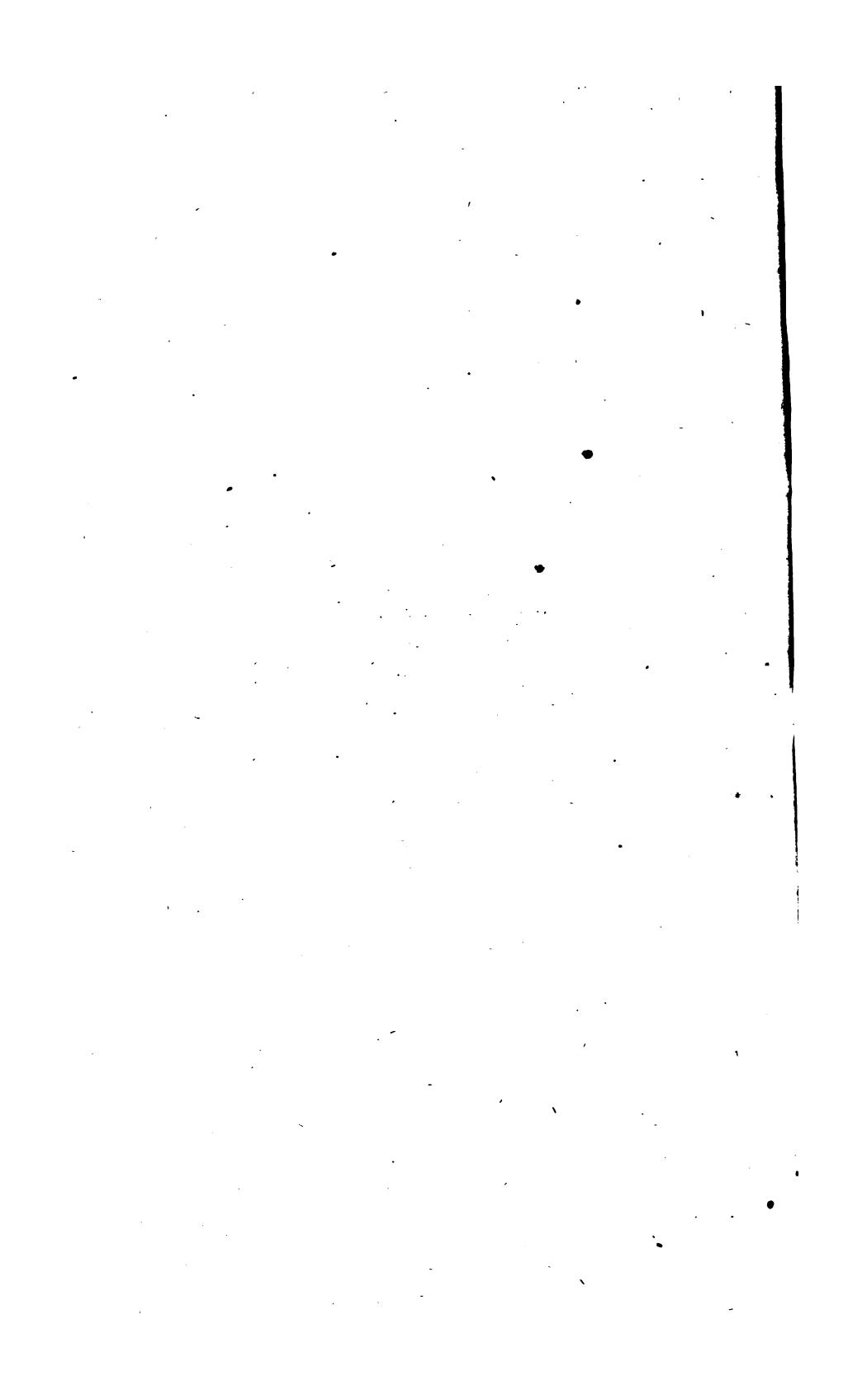
used the history where it suited my purpose, without considering myself bound to adhere to it; but I have been careful not to introduce any thing which would be at variance with the manners and superstitions of the northern nations at the period which I have chosen. It appears to be doubtful whether the history of Hialmar is referable to the reign of Ingva, who was king in Sweden sixty years before the birth of Christ, at Upsal or Sigtun, which was the site of Stockholm, or to a later king Ingva, who reigned in the latter part of the third century. Schöning reckons that Angantyr the son of Eyfur or Eydora, lived in the reign of the first Ingva, and that he has been confounded with Angantyr who fought with Hialmar in the reign of the second Ingva; and the mother of the second Angantyr seems to have been Gudruna, daughter of a Danish king who reigned at Ledra, the old royal residence in Zealand. The exact date is of very little importance; for the manners of the two periods were, as far as we know, precisely similar. Angrim, the fa-

ther of the first Angantyr, dwelt in Helgeland ; but I have represented the father of Angantyr as king at Ledra in Zealand, where his grandfather appears in fact to have reigned. Orvarodd, whose name signifies the point of an arrow, was an expert archer. He was a Norwegian, and Asbiorn is stated by Suhm to have been a Dane, brought by accidental circumstances to the court of king Ingva, but I have represented them all as Swedes. All that is related concerning Asbiorn in Suhm is, that he was the companion in arms of Hialmar and Orvarodd ; that he was sick at the time of the challenge, and that, unwilling to survive his friend Hialmar, he killed himself upon his grave. The part which I have made him bear in the poem is fictitious, as indeed are the whole of the second, third, fourth, and fifth cantos. The real name of king's Ingva's daughter was Ingebiorg, a name much too uncouth for English poetry ; and as the main part of my story is fictitious, I did not think it desirable to retain it. The history, as it is given in Hervarar Saga, will be

found in the first part of my Icelandic translations : it is there said that Orvarodd bore the dead body of Hialmar to Sigtun, and that Ingebiorg would not survive him, and destroyed herself.



APPENDIX.



THE

SONG OF VALA.



THE

SONG OF VALA.

SILENCE all ye sons of glory!

Silence all ye powers of light!

While I sing of ancient story,

Wonders wrapt in mystic night!

I was rock'd in giant's cradle,

5

Giant's lore my wisdom gave;

I have known both good and evil,

Now I lie in lowly grave.

Long before the birth of Odin,
Mute was thunderous ocean's roar ; 10
Stillness o'er the huge earth brooding,
Strand was none or rocky shore.

Neither grass, nor green tree growing,
Vernal shower, nor wintery storm ;
Nor those horses bright and glowing 15
Dragg'd the sun's resplendent form.

He who rules by night the heaven
Wist not where his beams to throw ;
All to barren darkness given,
There confusion, hell below. 20

Imir sat with lonely sadness
Watching o'er the fruitless globe ;
Never morning beam'd with gladness,
Never eve with dewy robe.

Who are those * in pride advancing
Through the barren tract of night?
Mark their steel divinely glancing!
Imir falls in holy fight!

25

Of his bones the rocks high swelling,
Of his flesh the glebe is made,
From his veins the tide is welling,
And his locks are verdant shade.

30

See the gods on lofty Ida,
All convened in council bright!
There dark Sleipner's warlike rider,
There each blissful son of light!

35

* Odin, Vili, and Ve, the sons of Bör, who slew Imir, and of his body created the world.

Hark ! his crest with gold adorning,

Chanticleer on Odin calls !

Hark ! another bird of morn

Claps his wings in Hela's halls !

40

Nature shines in glory beaming,

Elves are born, and man is form'd ;

Every hill with gladness teeming,

Every shape with life is warm'd.

Mark yon tree by Urdra's fountain !

45

From its spreading boughs distil

Mists that clothe each verdant mountain,

Dews that feed each gurgling rill.

Who is he by heaven's high portal,

Beaming like the light of morn ?

50

'Tis Heimdallar's form immortal ;

Shrill resounds his golden horn.

Say, proud wardour robed in glory,

Are the foes of nature nigh?

Have they climb'd the mountains hoary? 55

Have they storm'd the vaulted sky?

On the wings of tempest riding,

Surtur spreads his fiery spell;

Elves in secret caves are hiding;

Odin meets the wolf of hell. 60

She* must taste a second sorrow,

She who wept when Balder bled;

Fate demands a nobler quarry;

Death must light on Odin's head.

* Frigga, the wife of Odin.—The avenger of Odin, mentioned in the next stanza, is Vidar the god of silence.

SONG OF VALA.

See ye not yon silent stranger?

65

Proud he moves with lowering eyes.

Odin, mark thy stern avenger!

Slain the shaggy monster lies!

See the serpent weakly crawling!

Thor has bruised its loathsome head!

70

Lo! the stars from heaven are falling!

Earth has sunk in Ocean's bed!

Glorious sun, thy beams are shrowded,

Vapours dank around thee sail;

Nature's eye with mists is clouded;

75

Shall the powers of ill prevail?

Say, shall Earth, with freshness beaming,

Once again from Ocean rise?

Shall the dawn of glory streaming

Wake us to immortal joys?

80

SONG OF VALA.

269

Once again, where Ida towering
Proudly crowns the verdant plain,
Sacred shades their walks imbowering,
Gods shall meet, a blissful train.

Fields until'd shall wave with treasure, 85
Woe and war and strife shall cease;
Wide shall flow the stream of pleasure,
Endless joy and holy peace.

He shall come in might eternal,
He whom eye hath never seen! 90
Earth, and Heaven, and Powers infernal,
Mark his port and awful mien!

He shall judge, and he shall sever
Shame from glory, ill from good!
These shall live in light for ever, 95
Those shall wade the chilling flood,

Dark to dwell, in woe reclining,
Far beyond the path of day;
In that bower, where serpents twining,
Loathsome spit their venom'd spray!

100

NOTES

TO

THE SONG OF VALA.



NOTES

TO

THE SONG OF VALA.

THIS song was written with an idea of inserting it in the second Canto of Helga, but it is more properly thrown into the Appendix. Many parts of it are freely imitated from a curious old poem called Volospá hin skemre, or the ancient Prophecy of Vala, which forms a part of the unpublished Edda. The name of its author is unknown.

*“ He who rules by night the heaven,
“ Wist not where his beams to throw.”*

Lines 17 and 18.

T

The Moon, a male deity in the northern mythology.

"Imir sat with lonely sadness."

Line 21.

In Volospá the prophetess says,

Ar var allda tha Imir bygde,

Varat sandr, ne sær, ne svaler unnir;

Jord faunz eva, ne upp himin;

Gab var Gynunga, enn grass hverge.

i. e. "First of all things was the age when Imir lived, there was no sand, nor sea, nor swelling waves; earth was found nowhere, nor heaven above; there was a deep abyss, but grass nowhere."

"See the gods on lofty Ida."

Line 33.

Hittust Æser a Idavelli.

The Gods or Asiatics were convened on mount Ida.—

Volospá, stanza 7.

This line is very singular, when we recollect Jupiter sitting on mount Ida, and consider that Volospá is perhaps the most ancient relick of northern poetry, and that Odin and his followers are supposed to have been driven from Asia by Mithridates. I do not think Ida is mentioned in any other of the northern writings, and I have nothing to produce in illustration of this remarkable line, excepting another line at the end of Volospá, where it is said, that when the world shall be renovated again after its destruction by fire, the Gods or Asi shall again meet on mount Ida.

“*There dark Sleipner's warlike rider.*”

Line 35.

Sleipner was the horse of Odin.

"Chanticleer on Odin calls."

Line 38.

Gol um Asom gullinkambe,
 Sá vekur hölda at heria fōdurs ;
 Enn ammar gielur fyrer jord nedan
 Sotraudur hane at saulom heliar.

i. e. "The golden-combed bird has sung amongst the Gods, which wakes men in the abode of the father of battle : but another sings underneath the earth, a ruddy fowl in the halls of Hela."—*Volospá*.

"Mark yon tree by Urdra's fountain."

Line 45.

Ask veit ec standa, heitr Ygdrasil,
 Thadan koma dögvar thær i dale falla.

i. e. "I know where an ash stands : it is called Ygdrasil ; from it come the dews, that fall in the valleys."—*Volospá*.

"Odin meets the wolf of hell."

Line 60.

Before Surtur destroys the world by fire, Odin is to be devoured by the wolf Fenris, which will break loose from hell.

"Odin, mark thy stern avenger."

Line 67.

Vidar will avenge the death of Odin by slaying the wolf.

"See the serpent weakly crawling."

Line 69.

Thor will slay the serpent of Midgard, but die immediately in consequence of its venomous bite.

"Lo! the stars from heaven are falling."

Line 71.

Sol tor sortna, sigr. folld i mar,
 Hverfa af himni heidar stiornor,
 Geisar eimi vid alldar nara,
 Leikr har hiti vid himin sialfan.

i. e. "The sun shall grow dark; the earth sinks in the sea, the serene stars fall from the heaven; the fire rages at the end of ages; the high heat licks the heaven itself." *Volospá.*

"*Say shall earth, with freshness beaming,*
 "*Once again from ocean rise?"*

Line 77.

Ser hun uppkoma odro sinni
 Jord or ægi idia græna.

i. e. "She sees the earth all green rise again from the sea."

"Fields until'd shall wave with treasure."

Line 85.

Muno osatir akrar vaxa;
Bauls man allz batna.

i. e. "The fields unsown shall yield increase, and all contention shall cease."

After the renovation of the earth, the gods will again assemble on mount Ida. Then (as is said in Volospá) shall come from above the powerful one who rules over every thing, to give divine judgment. The good shall inhabit a dwelling brighter than the sun, and live in joy throughout all eternity; but the wicked shall wade through rapid rivers to an abode dropping with poison and surrounded by serpents, where they shall never behold the sun.

There is something very remarkable in this conclusion of

the creed of the old Scandinavian nations, which acknowledges the mortality and looks for the resurrection of those whom they had dignified with the title of gods, and holds out the expectation of a time when some greater unknown power would come in majesty to judge the world.

BRYNHILDA.



BRYNHILDA.

O STRANGE is the bower where Brynhilda reclines,
Around it the watchfire high bickering shines!
Her couch is of iron, her pillow a shield,
And the maiden's chaste eyes are in deep slumber seal'd.
Thy charm, dreadful Odin, around her is spread, 5
From thy wand the dread slumber was pour'd on her head.
The bridegroom must pass thro' the furnace and flame,
The boldest in fight, without fear, without blame.
O whilom in battle, so bold and so free,
Like a pirate victorious she roved o'er the sea. 10
The helmet has oft bound the ringlets, that now

Adown her smooth shoulder so carelessly flow ;
And that snowy bosom, thus lovely reveal'd,
Has been oft by the breastplate's tough iron conceal'd.
The love-lighting eyes, which are fetter'd by sleep, 15
Have seen the sea-fight raging fierce o'er the deep,
And mid the dread wounds of the dying and slain
The tide of destruction pour'd wide o'er the plain.
Those soft-rounded arms now defenceless and bare,
Those rosy-tipp'd fingers so graceful and fair, 20
Have rein'd the hot courser, and oft bathed in gore
The merciless edge of the dreaded claymore.
Who is it that spurs his dark steed at the fire ?
Who is it, whose wishes thus boldly aspire
To the chamber of shields, where the beautiful maid 25
By the spell of the mighty defenceless is laid ?
Is it Sigurd the valiant, the slayer of kings,
With the spoils of the Dragon, his gold and his rings ?
Or is it bold Gunnar, who vainly assays

On the horse of good Sigurd to rush thro' the blaze? 30
The steed knows his rider in field and in stall ;
No other hands rein him, no other spurs gall.
He brooks not the warrior that pricks his dark side,
Be he prince, be he chieftain of might and of pride.
How he neighs ! how he plunges, and tosses his mane! 35
How he foams ! how he lashes his flank with disdain !
O crest-fallen Gunnar, thou liest on the plain !
Through the furnace no warrior, save Sigurd, may ride ;
Let his valor for thee win the spell-guarded bride !
He has mounted his war-horse, the beauteous and bold ; 40
His buckler and harness are studded with gold.
A dragon all writhing in gore is his crest ;
A dragon is burnish'd in gold on his breast.
The furnace glows redder, the flames crackle round,
But the horse and the rider plunge thro' at one bound. 45
He has reach'd the dark canopy's shield-cover'd shade,
Where spell-bound the beautiful damsel is laid ;

He has kiss'd her closed eyelids, and called her his bride;
He has stretch'd his bold limbs in the gloom by her side.

“ My name is bold Gunnar, and Grana my steed; 50
“Through the bickering furnace I prick'd him with speed.”

The maiden all languidly lifts up her head,
She seems in her trance half awaked from the dead ;
Like a swan on the salt-lake she mournfully cries,
“ Does the bravest of warriors claim me as his prize?” 55

O know'st thou, young Sigurd, who lies by thy side?
O kenn'st thou, Brynhilda, who calls thee his bride ?
On the gay hills of France dwells thy proud foster-sire,
And there thy chaste bower was guarded by fire.
It was mantled with ivy and luscious woodbine, 60
It was shrowded with jasmine and sweet eglantine.
O mind'st thou, when darkling thou sat'st in thy bower,
What courser came fleet by thy charm-circled tower?
Whose hawk on thy casement perch'd saucy and free ?
What warrior pursued it? Whose crest did'st thou see? 65

Did the gold-burnish'd dragon gleam bright to thy view ?
Did thy spells hold him back, or did Sigurd break through?
For whom the bright mead did thy snowy hands pour,
Which never for man crown'd the goblet before ?
On the wonders of nature, the stories of eld, 70
On the secrets of magic high converse ye held :
He sat by thy side, and he gazed on thy face,
He hail'd thee most worthy of Sigurd's embrace ;
The wisest of women, the loveliest maid,
The bravest that ever in battle outrade : 75
And there, in the gloom of that mystic alcove,
Ye pledged to each other the firm oath of love.
Now spell-bound thou canst not his features descry,
Thy charms in the gloom do not meet his keen eye.
For Sigurd had hied to defend Giuka's crown, 80
He dwelt there with glory, he fought with renown ;
At the court of good Giuka his warriors among
None bore him so gallant, so brave, and so strong.

Gudruna beheld him with eyes of desire,
The noblest of knights at the court of her sire. 85
She mix'd the love-potion with charm and with spell,
And all his frail oaths from his memory fell.
She conquer'd his faith by the treacherous snare ;
He led to the altar Gudruna the fair :
And now with her brother unconscious he came, 90
Who dared the chaste hand of Brynhilda to claim.
But Gunnar the bold could not break through the spell ;
The flame bicker'd high, on the ground as he fell:
And Sigurd the glorious, the mighty, must lend
His valor to gain the fair prize for his friend. 95
All night there he tarried, but ever between
The maid and the knight lay his sword bright and sheen.
The Morrow he rode to the battle afar,
And changed the maid's couch for the turmoil of war.
His friend reaps the harvest his valor has won, 100
And claims the fair guerdon ere fall of the sun.

With pomp to the altar he leads the young bride,
She deems him the knight who had lain by her side ;
Forgotten the vows she had made in gay France,
Ere Odin cast o'er her the magical trance. 105
With gorgeous carousal, with dance and with song,
With wassail his liegemen the nuptials prolong ;
He revels in rapture and bliss through the night,
And the swift hours are pass'd in the arms of delight :
But when the bright morning first dawn'd on their bed, 110
The bride raised with anguish her grief-stricken head ;
For the thoughts of the past rose with force, and too late
She remember'd young Sigurd, and cursed her sad fate.
Three days and three nights there in silence she lay,
To sullen despair and dark horror a prey. 115
She tasted no food, and to none she replied,
But spurn'd the sad bridegroom with hate from her side.
Shall the words of young Sigurd now bid her rejoice ?
Does she hear his known accents, and start at his voice ?

“ Awake, fair Brynhilda, behold the bright ray! 120
“ The flowers in the forest are laughing and gay.
“ Full long hast thou slept on the bosom of woe;
“ Awake, fair Brynhilda, and see the sun glow!”
She heard him with anguish, and raising her head,
She gazed on his features, then proudly she said: 125
“ I chuse not two husbands, and marvel that thou
“ Shouldst dare thus intrude in my chamber of woe.
“ Heaven witness, proud Sigurd, how firmly I loved!
“ My fancy adored thee, my reason approved.
“ Thou saw’st me in bloom of my glory and youth, 130
“ And our hearts interchanged the chaste promise of truth.
“ Mid the damsels of Hlyndale no maid was so fair,
“ So courted in bower, so dreaded in war.
“ Like a Virgin of slaughter I roved o’er the sea,
“ My arm was victorious, my valor was free. 135
“ By prowess, by Runic enchantment and song,
“ I raised up the weak, and I beat down the strong.

“ I held the young prince mid the hurly of war,
“ My arm waved around him the charm’d scimitar ;
“ I saved him in battle, I crown’d him in hall, 140
“ Though Odin and fate had foredoom’d him to fall.
“ Hence Odin’s dread curses were pour’d on my head ;
“ He doom’d the undaunted Brynhilda to wed.
“ But I vow’d the high-vow which gods dare not gainsay,
“ That the bravest in warfare should bear me away : 145
“ And full well I knew, that thou, Sigurd, alone
“ Of mortals the boldest in battle hast shone.
“ I knew that none other the furnace could stem,
“ (So wrought was the spell, and so fierce was the flame)
“ Save Sigurd the glorious, the slayer of kings, 150
“ With the spoils of the Dragon, his gold and his rings.
“ Now thy treason has marr’d me, to Gunnar resign’d
“ By the force of the spell, when my reason was blind.
“ At my nuptials I loathed the embrace of his lust,
“ But I smother’d my hate and conceal’d my disgust ; 155

“ And sooner than forfeit the faith which I gave
“ At the altar to him, will I sink in my grave.
“ Like a brother thou slept’st in the gloom by my side,
“ And pure as the day-star was Gunnar’s young bride.
“ Yet hence did Gudruna revile me, and say 160
“ In the arms of proud Sigurd despoiled I lay.
“ Now, Prince, shalt thou perish, if vengeance be due
“ To love disappointed, though faithful and true!
“ Though gallant thou ridest to the battle afar,
“ Though foremost thy steed in the red fields of war, 165
“ Like the death-breathing blast of the pestilent night
“ My hate shall o’ertake thee, my fury shall smite!”
He left her desponding; then sadly she rose,
Like a lily all pale, from the couch of her woes:
Stream’d loosely the ringlets of jet o’er her breast, 170
And her eyes’ ray was languid, with sorrow opprest;
Yet lovely she moved, like the silvery beam
Of the moon-light that kisses the slow-gliding stream.

She sought Gunnar's chamber, awhile by his side
Stood mournfully pensive, then sternly she cried : 175

“ To thee have I pledged my firm oath as thy bride,
“ And, Gunnar, I hate thee ! Yet be it not said
“ That Budela's proud daughter her faith has betray'd.
“ To thee (woe the hour !) by the vengeance of heaven
“ The flower of my youth and my fealty was given. 180
“ Nor mortal shall dare with the breath of frail love
“ The heart of ill-fated Brynhilda to move.
“ But never again shall I rest on thy bed,
“ And ne'er on my breast shalt thou pillow thy head,
“ Till slain by thy steel in the night's silent hour 185
“ The treacherous Sigurd lies stiff in his gore ;
“ Till by treason he falls, who by treason has left
“ Brynhilda of joy and of honour bereft.”

Sad Gunnar, what strife thy fond bosom must rend !
First gaze on her beauty, then think of thy friend ! 190
The slumber of midnight has sealed his bold eyes,

In the arms of Gudruna defenceless he lies.

'Tis done; in his blood the cold warrior is found,

But breathless his murderer lies on the ground.

Though gored and expiring, ere lifeless he fell,

Stout Sigurd's arm sent his assassin to hell.

195

Mid the night's baneful gloom, see the torches that glare!

The mourners that give their wild locks to the air!

She has mounted the funeral pile with the slain,

With her slaves, with her women, a loud shrieking train. 200

The fairest, the noblest for honour and truth,

In the prime of her glory, the bloom of her youth.

The fire shall consume them, the living and dead,

And in one lofty mound their cold ashes be laid

N O T E

TO

BRYNHILDA.

THE particulars of the history of Sigurd and Brynhilda are related at length in the notes to the second part of my Icelandic Translations.

I have committed an error in the notes to the song of Regner Lodbrok, in the second part of my Icelandic translations, where I have said, that he married the daughter of Sigurd, and have stated that the mention of Sigurd in the song of Hroke the black, would be an argument against its having been written in the sixth century. I have confounded Aslauga, the wife of Regner and daughter of Sigurd Svend

in the eighth century, with Aslauga, the daughter of Sigurd Sigmundson, who was cotemporary with Attila, king of the Huns, in the fifth century. His widow Gudruna, sometimes called Grimhilda, was afterwards one of the numerous wives whom Attila successively married.

Postscript.—I have just had an opportunity of reading an interesting work, called Illustrations of Northern Antiquities, produced by the joint labors of Mr. Weber and Mr. Jamieson. It contains, amongst other curious articles, an epitome of an ancient Teutonic lay, called Der Nibelungen Lied, answering to the Niflunga Saga of the Scandinavians, which professes to have been in part digested from ancient German songs.

The Teutonic lay contains an account of part of the history of Sigurd and Brynhilda, the marriage of the widow of Sigurd with king Attila, and the events that followed, with

some variations from the Icelandic Saga, but with a general resemblance as to the leading circumstances.

Mr. Weber mentions (p. 27) that, "in Volsunga and Norna Gest's Sagas, Brynhildr is a mythological personage, one of the Valkyriur, and not a mere *mortal* virgin as in the Teutonic romances." With all deference to his usual accuracy, I can by no means concur in this observation. It is undoubtedly founded upon a single expression in one of the above-mentioned Sagas, (in Volsunga Saga, if I recollect rightly,) "Hun var Valkyrie, she was a Valkyrie," to which it is added that she had the power of transporting herself through the air. All the Scandinavian accounts of Brynhildr concur in representing her as a mortal, the daughter of king Budla, who in her youth being of a very masculine disposition had sailed upon piratical expeditions, and become very renowned in war. She was skilled in incantations (a faculty which, I imagine, was attributed to all who were adepts in

writing and reading the Runic characters), and she is said to have incurred the resentment of Odin in consequence of her having given victory to Audbroder in opposition to the intentions of the deity, on which account she is figuratively called a Valkyrie in that single passage : but she is no where mentioned as being one of the immortal Valkyriur who were deities acting under the directions of Odin, or as having performed any one of the usual acts of their ministry. After revenging herself by the murder of Sigurd, whom she still loved above all mankind, she ascended his funeral pile together with her slaves, and was burnt to death for the purpose of honoring his obsequies. Her tragic history is that of a proud and distinguished woman, endowed, according to the ideas of the period at which she lived, with every accomplishment, and punished by the deity for the excess of her presumption. I see no reason to doubt her having really existed, although her history is blended with the fabulous and supernatural ; and at least there is no more

reason for calling her a mythological personage, than Medea, with whose character that of Brynhildr bears some analogy. *Mortal* she is certainly represented to have been, for her death is particularly detailed.

I am sorry to observe that Mr. Weber has repeated (I fear upon my authority) the objection to the Scandinavian chronology, under the idea that Regner Lodbrok had married the daughter of Sigurd and Brynhildr, an error which I regret that I had no earlier opportunity of rectifying.

THE END.

